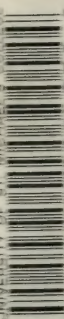


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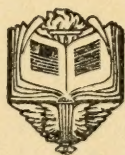


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THE WORLD'S
POPULAR CLASSICS

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SHORT STORIES OF
DE MAUPASSANT



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BALL-OF-FAT

FOR MANY DAYS NOW the fag end of the army had been straggling through the town. They were not troops but a disbanded horde. The beards of the men were long and filthy, their uniforms in tatters, and they advanced at an easy pace without flag or regiment. All seemed worn out and back broken, incapable of a thought or a resolution, marching by habit solely and falling from fatigue as soon as they stopped. In short, they were a mobilized, pacific people, bending under the weight of the gun; some little squads on the alert, easy to take alarm and prompt in enthusiasm, ready to attack or to flee; and in the midst of them some red breeches, the remains of a division broken up in a great battle; some somber artillerymen in line with these varied kinds of foot soldiers, and sometimes the brilliant helmet of a dragoon on foot who followed with difficulty the shortest march of the lines.

Some legions of free shooters, under the heroic names of Avengers of the Defeat, Citizens of the Tomb, Partakers of Death, passed in their turn with the air of bandits.

Their leaders were former cloth or grain merchants, ex-merchants in tallow or soap, warriors of circumstance, elected officers on account of their escutcheons and the length of their mustaches, covered with arms and with braid, speaking in constrained voices, discussing plans of campaign and pretending to carry agonized France alone on their swaggering shoulders but sometimes fearing their own soldiers, prison birds, that were often brave at first and later proved to be plunderers and debauchees.

It was said that the Prussians were going to enter Rouen.

The National Guard who for two months had been carefully reconnoitering in the neighboring woods, shooting sometimes their own sentinels and ready for a combat whenever a little wolf stirred in the thicket, had now returned to their firesides. Their arms, their uniforms, all the murderous accouterments with which they had lately struck fear into the national heart for three leagues in every direction, had suddenly disappeared.

The last French soldiers finally came across the Seine to reach the Audemer bridge through Saint-Sever and Bourg-Achard; and marching behind, on foot, between two officers of ordnance, the general, in

despair, unable to do anything with these incongruous tatters, himself lost in the breaking up of a people accustomed to conquer, and disastrously beaten in spite of his legendary bravery.

A profound calm, a frightful, silent expectancy had spread over the city. Many of the heavy citizens, emasculated by commerce, anxiously awaited the conquerors, trembling lest their roasting spits or kitchen knives be considered arms.

All life seemed stopped; shops were closed, the streets dumb. Sometimes an inhabitant, intimidated by this silence, moved rapidly along next the walls. The agony of waiting made them wish the enemy would come.

In the afternoon of the day which followed the departure of the French troops some uhlans, coming from one knows not where, crossed the town with celerity. Then a little later a black mass descended the side of St. Catherine, while two other invading bands appeared by the way of Darnetal and Bois-Guillaume. The advance guard of the three bodies joined one another at the same moment in Hôtel de Ville square, and by all the neighboring streets the German army continued to arrive, spreading out its battalions, making the pavement resound under their hard, rhythmic step.

Some orders of the commander, in a foreign, guttural voice, reached the houses which seemed dead and deserted, while behind closed shutters eyes were watching these victorious men, masters of the city, of fortunes, of lives, through the "rights of war." The inhabitants, shut up in their rooms, were visited with the kind of excitement that a cataclysm or some fatal upheaval of the earth brings to us, against which all force is useless. For the same sensation is produced each time that the established order of things is overturned, when security no longer exists and all that protect the laws of man and of nature find themselves at the mercy of unreasoning, ferocious brutality. The trembling of the earth crushing the houses and burying an entire people; a river overflowing its banks and carrying in its course the drowned peasants, carcasses of bees and girders snatched from roofs, or a glorious army massacring those trying to defend themselves, leading other prisoners, pillaging in the name of the sword and thanking God to the sound of the cannon; all are alike frightful scourges which disconnect all belief in eternal justice, all the confidence that we have in the protection of Heaven and the reason of man.

Some detachments rapped at each door, then disappeared into the houses. It was occupation after invasion. Then the duty commences for the conquered to show themselves gracious toward the conquerors.

After some time, as soon as the first terror disappears, a new calm is established. In many families the Prussian officer eats at the table. He is sometimes well bred and, through politeness, pities France and speaks of his repugnance in taking part in this affair. One is grateful to him for this sentiment; then, one may be, someday or other, in need of his protection. By treating him well one has, perhaps, a less number of men to feed. And why should we wound anyone on whom we are entirely dependent? To act thus would be less bravery than temerity. And temerity is no longer a fault of the commoner of Rouen as it was at the time of the heroic defense when their city became famous. Finally each told himself that the highest judgment of French urbanity required that they be allowed to be polite to the strange soldier in the house, provided they did not show themselves familiar with him in public. Outside they would not make themselves known to each other, but at home they could chat freely, and the German might remain longer each evening warming his feet at their hearthstones.

The town even took on, little by little, its ordinary aspect. The French scarcely went out, but the Prussian soldiers grumbled in the streets. In short, the officers of the Blue Hussars, who dragged with arrogance their great weapons of death up and down the pavement, seemed to have no more grievous scorn for the simple citizens than the officers or the sportsmen who, the year before, drank in the same cafés.

There was, nevertheless, something in the air, something subtle and unknown, a strange, intolerable atmosphere like a penetrating odor, the odor of invasion. It filled the dwellings and the public places, changed the taste of the food, gave the impression of being on a journey, far away among barbarous and dangerous tribes.

The conquerors exacted money, much money. The inhabitants always paid and they were rich enough to do it. But the richer a trading Norman becomes the more he suffers at every outlay, at each part of his fortune that he sees pass from his hands into those of another.

Therefore, two or three leagues below the town, following the course of the river toward Croisset, Dieppedalle or Biessard, mariners and fishermen often picked up the swollen corpse of a German in uniform from the bottom of the river, killed by the blow of a knife, the head crushed with a stone, or perhaps thrown into the water by a push from the high bridge. The slime of the river bed buried these obscure vengeance, savage but legitimate, unknown heroisms, mute attacks more perilous than the battles of broad day and without the echoing sound of glory.

For hatred of the foreigner always arouses some intrepid ones who are ready to die for an idea.

Finally, as soon as the invaders had brought the town quite under subjection with their inflexible discipline, without having been guilty of any of the horrors for which they were famous along their triumphal line of march, people began to take courage, and the need of trade put new heart into the commerce of the country. Some had large interests at Havre, which the French army occupied, and they wished to try and reach this port by going to Dieppe by land and there embarking.

They used their influence with the German soldiers with whom they had an acquaintance, and finally an authorization of departure was obtained from the general in chief.

Then, a large diligence with four horses having been engaged for this journey, and ten persons having engaged seats in it, it was resolved to set out on Tuesday morning before daylight, in order to escape observation.

For some time before, the frost had been hardening the earth, and on Monday, toward three o'clock, great black clouds coming from the north brought the snow which fell without interruption during the evening and all night.

At half-past four in the morning the travelers met in the courtyard of Hôtel Normandie, where they were to take the carriage.

They were still full of sleep and shivering with cold under their wraps. They could only see each other dimly in the obscure light, and the accumulation of heavy winter garments made them all resemble fat curates in long cassocks. Only two of the men were acquainted; a third accosted them and they chatted: "I'm going to take my wife," said one. "I too," said another. "And I," said the third. The first added: "We shall not return to Rouen, and if the Prussians approach Havre, we shall go over to England." All had the same projects, being of the same mind.

As yet the horses were not harnessed. A little lantern, carried by a stableboy, went out one door from time to time, to immediately appear at another. The feet of the horses striking the floor could be heard, although deadened by the straw and litter, and the voice of a man talking to the beasts, sometimes swearing, came from the end of the building. A light tinkling of bells announced that they were taking down the harness; this murmur soon became a clear and continuous rhythm by the movement of the animal, stopping sometimes, then breaking into a brusque shake which was accompanied by the dull stamp of a sabot upon the hard earth.

The door suddenly closed. All noise ceased. The frozen citizens were silent; they remained immovable and stiff.

A curtain of uninterrupted white flakes constantly sparkled in its descent to the ground. It effaced forms and powdered everything with a downy moss. And nothing could be heard in the great silence. The town was calm and buried under the wintry frost as this fall of snow, unnamable and floating, a sensation rather than a sound (trembling atoms which only seem to fill all space), came to cover the earth.

The man reappeared with his lantern, pulling at the end of a rope a sad horse which would not come willingly. He placed him against the pole, fastened the traces, walked about a long time adjusting the harness, for he had the use of but one hand, the other carrying the lantern. As he went for the second horse he noticed the travelers, motionless, already white with snow, and said to them: "Why not get into the carriage? You will be under cover at least."

They had evidently not thought of it, and they hastened to do so. The three men installed their wives at the back and then followed them. Then the other forms, undecided and veiled, took in their turn the last places without exchanging a word.

The floor was covered with straw, in which the feet ensconced themselves. The ladies at the back having brought little copper foot stoves, with a carbon fire, lighted them and for some time, in low voices, enumerated the advantages of the appliances, repeating things that they had known for a long time.

Finally the carriage was harnessed with six horses instead of four, because the traveling was very bad, and a voice called out:

"Is everybody aboard?"

And a voice within answered: "Yes."

They were off. The carriage moved slowly, slowly for a little way. The wheels were imbedded in the snow; the whole body groaned with heavy cracking sounds; the horses glistened, puffed and smoked; and the great whip of the driver snapped without ceasing, hovering about on all sides, knotting and unrolling itself like a thin serpent, lashing brusquely some horse on the rebound, which then put forth its most violent effort.

Now the day was imperceptibly dawning. The light flakes, which one of the travelers, a Rouenese by birth, said looked like a shower of cotton, no longer fell. A faint light filtered through the great dull clouds, which rendered more brilliant the white of the fields, where appeared a line of great trees clothed in whiteness or a chimney with a cap of snow.

In the carriage each looked at the others curiously in the sad light of this dawn.

At the back, in the best places, M. Loiseau, wholesale merchant of wine, of Grand-Pont Street, and Mme Loiseau were sleeping opposite each other. Loiseau had bought out his former patron, who failed in business, and made his fortune. He sold bad wine at a good price to small retailers in the country and passed among his friends and acquaintances as a knavish wag, a true Norman full of deceit and joviality.

His reputation as a sharper was so well established that one evening at the residence of the prefect, M. Tournel, author of some fables and songs, of keen, satirical mind, a local celebrity, having proposed to some ladies, who seemed to be getting a little sleepy, that they make up a game of "Loiseau tricks," the joke traversed the rooms of the prefect, reached those of the town and then, in the months to come, made many a face in the province expand with laughter.

Loiseau was especially known for his love of farce of every kind, for his jokes, good and bad; and no one could ever talk with him without thinking: "He is invaluable, this Loiseau." Of tall figure, his balloon-shaped front was surmounted by a ruddy face surrounded by gray whiskers.

His wife, large, strong and resolute, with a quick, decisive manner, was the order and arithmetic of this house of commerce, while he was the life of it through his joyous activity.

Beside them M. Carré-Lamadon held himself with great dignity, as if belonging to a superior caste; a considerable man in cottons, proprietor of three mills, officer of the Legion of Honor and member of the General Council. He had remained, during the Empire, chief of the friendly opposition, famous for making the emperor pay more dear for rallying to the cause than if he had combated it with blunted arms, according to his own story. Mme Carré-Lamadon, much younger than her husband, was the consolation of officers of good family sent to Rouen in garrison. She sat opposite her husband, very dainty, petite and pretty, wrapped closely in furs and looking with sad eyes at the interior of the carriage.

Her neighbors, the Count and Countess Hubert de Breville, bore the name of one of the most ancient and noble families of Normandy. The count, an old gentleman of good figure, accentuated by the artifices of his toilette his resemblance to King Henry IV, who, following a glorious legend of the family, had impregnated one of the De Breville ladies, whose husband, for this reason, was made a count and governor of the province.

A colleague of M. Carré-Lamadon in the General Council, Count Hubert represented the Orléans party in the department.

The story of his marriage with the daughter of a little captain of a privateer had always remained a mystery. But as the countess had a grand air, received better than anyone and passed for having been loved by the son of Louis Philippe, all the nobility did her honor, and her salon remained the first in the country, the only one which preserved the old gallantry and to which the entree was difficult. The fortune of the Brevilles amounted, it was said, to five hundred thousand francs in income, all in good securities.

These six persons formed the foundation of the carriage company, the society side, serene and strong, honest, established people, who had both religion and principles.

By a strange chance all the women were upon the same seat, and the countess had for neighbors two sisters who picked at long strings of beads and muttered some "Paters" and "Aves." One was old and as pitted with smallpox as if she had received a broadside of grape-shot full in the face. The other, very sad, had a pretty face and a disease of the lungs, which, added to their devoted faith, illumined them and made them appear like martyrs.

Opposite these two devotees were a man and a woman who attracted the notice of all. The man, well known, was Cornudet the democrat, the terror of respectable people. For twenty years he had soaked his great red beard in the bocks of all the democratic cafés. He had consumed with his friends and confreres a rather pretty fortune left him by his father, an old confectioner, and he awaited the establishing of the Republic with impatience, that he might have the position he merited by his great expenditures. On the fourth of September, by some joke perhaps, he believed himself elected prefect, but when he went to assume the duties the clerks of the office were masters of the place and refused to recognize him, obliging him to retreat. Rather a good bachelor on the whole, inoffensive and serviceable, he had busied himself, with incomparable ardor, in organizing the defense against the Prussians. He had dug holes in all the plains, cut down young trees from the neighboring forests, sown snares over all routes and, at the approach of the enemy, took himself quickly back to the town. He now thought he could be of more use in Havre, where more entrenchments would be necessary.

The woman, one of those called a coquette, was celebrated for her *embonpoint*, which had given her the nick-name of "Ball-of-Fat." Small, round and fat as lard, with puffy fingers choked at the phalanges like chaplets of short sausages, with a stretched and shining skin, an

enormous bosom which shook under her dress, she was, nevertheless, pleasing and sought after on account of a certain freshness and breeziness of disposition. Her face was a round apple, a peony bud ready to pop into bloom, and inside that opened two great black eyes shaded with thick brows that cast a shadow within; and below, a charming mouth, humid for kissing, furnished with shining, microscopic baby teeth. She was, it was said, full of admirable qualities.

As soon as she was recognized a whisper went around among the honest women, and the words "prostitute" and "public shame" were whispered so loud that she raised her head. Then she threw at her neighbors such a provoking, courageous look that a great silence reigned, and everybody looked down except Loiseau, who watched her with an exhilarated air.

And immediately conversation began among the three ladies, whom the presence of this girl had suddenly rendered friendly, almost intimate. It seemed to them they should bring their married dignity into union in opposition to that sold without shame; for legal love always takes on a tone of contempt for its free confrere.

The three men, also drawn together by an instinct of preservation at the sight of Cornudet, talked money with a certain high tone of disdain for the poor. Count Hubert talked of the havoc which the Prussians had caused, the losses which resulted from being robbed of cattle and from destroyed crops, with the assurance of a great lord, ten times millionaire, whom these ravages would scarcely cramp for a year. M. Carré-Lamadon, largely experienced in the cotton industry, had had need of sending six hundred thousand francs to England, as a trifle in reserve if it should be needed. As for Loiseau, he had arranged with the French administration to sell them all the wines that remained in his cellars, on account of which the State owed him a formidable sum which he counted on collecting at Havre.

And all three threw toward each other swift and amicable glances.

Although in different conditions, they felt themselves to be brothers through money, that grand freemasonry of those who possess it and make the gold rattle by putting their hands in their trousers' pockets.

The carriage went so slowly that at ten o'clock in the morning they had not gone four leagues. The men had got down three times to climb hills on foot. They began to be disturbed because they should be now taking breakfast at Tôtes, and they despaired now of reaching there before night. Each one had begun to watch for an inn along the route, when the carriage foundered in a snowdrift and it took two hours to extricate it.

(Growing appetites troubled their minds; and no eating house, no

wineshop showed itself, the approach of the Prussians and the passage of the troops having frightened away all these industries.

The gentlemen ran to the farms along the way for provisions, but they did not even find bread, for the defiant peasant had concealed his stores for fear of being pillaged by the soldiers who, having nothing to put between their teeth, took by force whatever they discovered.

Toward one o'clock in the afternoon Loiseau announced that there was a decided hollow in his stomach. Everybody suffered with him, and the violent need of eating, ever increasing, had killed conversation.

From time to time someone yawned; another immediately imitated him; and each, in his turn, in accordance with his character, his knowledge of life and his social position, opened his mouth with carelessness or modesty, placing his hand quickly before the yawning hole from whence issued a vapor.

Ball-of-Fat, after many attempts, bent down as if seeking something under her skirts. She hesitated a second, looked at her neighbors, then sat up again tranquilly. The faces were pale and drawn. Loiseau affirmed that he would give a thousand francs for a small ham. His wife made a gesture as if in protest, but she kept quiet. She was always troubled when anyone spoke of squandering money and could not comprehend any pleasantry on the subject. "The fact is," said the count, "I cannot understand why I did not think to bring some provisions with me." Each reproached himself in the same way.

However, Cornudet had a flask full of rum. He offered it; it was refused coldly. Loiseau alone accepted two swallows and then passed back the flask saying, by way of thanks: "It is good all the same; it is warming and checks the appetite." The alcohol put him in good humor, and he proposed that they do as they did on the little ship in the song, eat the fattest of the passengers. This indirect allusion to Ball-of-Fat choked the well-bred people. They said nothing. Cornudet alone laughed. The two good sisters had ceased to mumble their rosaries and, with their hands enfolded in their great sleeves, held themselves immovable, obstinately lowering their eyes, without doubt offering to Heaven the suffering it had brought upon them.

Finally at three o'clock, when they found themselves in the midst of an interminable plain, without a single village in sight, Ball-of-Fat, bending down quickly, drew from under the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

At first she brought out a little china plate and a silver cup, then a large dish in which there were two whole chickens, cut up and

imbedded in their own jelly. And one could still see in the basket other good things, some *pâtés*, fruits and sweetmeats, provisions for three days if they should not see the kitchen of an inn. Four necks of bottles were seen among the packages of food. She took a wing of a chicken and began to eat it delicately with one of those biscuits called "Regence" in Normandy.

All looks were turned in her direction. Then the odor spread, enlarging the nostrils and making the mouth water, besides causing a painful contraction of the jaw behind the ears. The scorn of the women for this girl became ferocious, as if they had a desire to kill her and throw her out of the carriage into the snow, her silver cup, her basket, provisions and all.

But Loiseau with his eyes devoured the dish of chicken. He said: "Fortunately Madame had more precaution than we. There are some people who know how to think ahead always."

She turned toward him, saying: "If you would like some of it, sir? It is hard to go without breakfast so long."

He saluted her and replied: "Faith, I frankly cannot refuse; I can stand it no longer. Everything goes in time of war, does it not, madame?" And then, casting a comprehensive glance around, he added: "In moments like this, one can but be pleased to find people who are obliging."

He had a newspaper which he spread out on his knees that no spot might come to his pantaloons, and upon the point of a knife that he always carried in his pocket he took up a leg all glistening with jelly, put it between his teeth and masticated it with a satisfaction so evident that there ran through the carriage a great sigh of distress.

Then Ball-of-Fat, in a sweet and humble voice, proposed that the two sisters partake of her collation. They both accepted instantly and, without raising their eyes, began to eat very quickly, after stammering their thanks. Cornudet no longer refused the offers of his neighbor, and they formed with the sisters a sort of table, by spreading out some newspapers upon their knees.

The mouths opened and shut without ceasing; they masticated, swallowed, gulping ferociously. Loiseau in his corner was working hard and, in a low voice, was trying to induce his wife to follow his example. She resisted for a long time; then, when a drawn sensation ran through her body, she yielded. Her husband, rounding his phrase, asked their "charming companion" if he might be allowed to offer a little piece to Mme Loiseau.

She replied: "Why, yes, certainly, sir," with an amiable smile as she passed the dish.

An embarrassing thing confronted them when they opened the first bottle of Bordeaux: they had but one cup. Each passed it after having tasted. Cornudet alone, for politeness without doubt, placed his lips at the spot left humid by his fair neighbor.

Then, surrounded by people eating, suffocated by the odors of the food, the Count and Countess de Breville, as well as Mme and M. Carré-Lamadon, were suffering that odious torment which has preserved the name of Tantalus. Suddenly the young wife of the manufacturer gave forth such a sigh that all heads were turned in her direction; she was as white as the snow without; her eyes closed, her head drooped; she had lost consciousness. Her husband, much excited, implored the help of everybody. Each lost his head completely, until the elder of the two sisters, holding the head of the sufferer, slipped Ball-of-Fat's cup between her lips and forced her to swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty little lady revived, opened her eyes, smiled and declared in a dying voice that she felt very well now. But, in order that the attack might not return, the sister urged her to drink a full glass of Bordeaux and added: "It is just hunger, nothing more."

Then Ball-of-Fat, blushing and embarrassed, looked at the four travelers who had fasted and stammered: "Goodness knows! if I dared to offer anything to these gentlemen and ladies, I would—" Then she was silent, as if fearing an insult. Loiseau took up the word: "Ah! certainly in times like these all the world are brothers and ought to aid each other. Come, ladies, without ceremony; why the devil not accept? We do not know whether we shall even find a house where we can pass the night. At the pace we are going now we shall not reach Tôtes before noon tomorrow."

They still hesitated, no one daring to assume the responsibility of a "Yes." The count decided the question. He turned toward the fat, intimidated girl and, taking on a grand air of condescension, he said to her:

"We accept with gratitude, madame."

It is the first step that counts. The Rubicon passed, one lends himself to the occasion squarely. The basket was stripped. It still contained a *pâté de foie gras*, a *pâté* of larks, a piece of smoked tongue, some preserved pears, a loaf of hard bread, some wafers and a full cup of pickled gherkins and onions, of which crudities Ball-of-Fat, like all women, was extremely fond.

They could not eat this girl's provisions without speaking to her. And so they chatted, with reserve at first; then, as she carried herself well, with more abandon. The ladies De Breville and Carré-Lamadon, who were acquainted with all the ins and outs of good breeding, were

gracious with a certain delicacy. The countess, especially, showed that amiable condescension of very noble ladies who do not fear being spoiled by contact with anyone and was charming. But the great Mme Loiseau, who had the soul of a plebian, remained crabbed, saying little and eating much.

The conversation was about the war, naturally. They related the horrible deeds of the Prussians, the brave acts of the French; and all of them, although running away, did homage to those who stayed behind. Then personal stories began to be told, and Ball-of-Fat related, with sincere emotion and in the heated words that such girls sometimes use in expressing their natural feelings, how she had left Rouen:

"I believed at first that I could remain," she said. "I had my house full of provisions, and I preferred to feed a few soldiers rather than expatriate myself, to go I knew not where. But as soon as I saw them, those Prussians, that was too much for me! They made my blood boil with anger, and I wept for very shame all day long. Oh! if I were only a man! I watched them from my windows, the great porkers with their pointed helmets, and my maid held my hands to keep me from throwing the furniture down upon them. Then one of them came to lodge at my house; I sprang at his throat the first thing; they are no more difficult to strangle than other people. And I should have put an end to that one then and there had they not pulled me away by the hair. After that it was necessary to keep out of sight. And finally, when I found an opportunity, I left town and—here I am!"

They congratulated her. She grew in the estimation of her companions, who had not shown themselves so hot-brained, and Cornudet, while listening to her, took on the approving, benevolent smile of an apostle, as a priest would if he heard a devotee praise God, for the long-bearded democrats have a monopoly of patriotism, as the men in cassocks have of religion. In his turn he spoke in a doctrinal tone, with the emphasis of a proclamation such as we see pasted on the walls about town, and finished by a bit of eloquence whereby he gave that "scamp of a Badinguet" a good lashing.

Then Ball-of-Fire was angry, for she was a Bonapartist. She grew redder than a cherry and, stammering with indignation, said:

"I would like to have seen you in his place, you other people. Then everything would have been quite right; oh yes! It is you who have betrayed this man! One would never have had to leave France if it had been governed by blackguards like you!"

Cornudet, undisturbed, preserved a disdainful, superior smile, but all felt that the high note had been struck, until the count, not with-

out some difficulty, calmed the exasperated girl and proclaimed with a manner of authority that all sincere opinions should be respected. But the countess and the manufacturer's wife, who had in their souls an unreasonable hatred for the people that favor a republic and the same instinctive tenderness that all women have for a decorative, despotic government, felt themselves drawn, in spite of themselves, toward this prostitute so full of dignity, whose sentiments so strongly resembled their own.

The basket was empty. By ten o'clock they had easily exhausted the contents and regretted that there was not more. Conversation continued for some time, but a little more coldly since they had finished eating.

The night fell; the darkness little by little became profound, and the cold, felt more during digestion, made Ball-of-Fat shiver in spite of her plumpness. Then Mme de Breville offered her the little foot stove, in which the fuel had been renewed many times since morning; she accepted it immediately, for her feet were becoming numb with cold. The ladies Carré-Lamadon and Loiseau gave theirs to the two religious sisters.

The driver had lighted his lanterns. They shone out with a lively glimmer, showing a cloud of foam beyond, the sweat of the horses; and, on both sides of the way, the snow seemed to roll itself along under the moving reflection of the lights.

Inside the carriage one could distinguish nothing. But a sudden movement seemed to be made between Ball-of-Fat and Cornudet; and Loiseau, whose eye penetrated the shadow, believed that he saw the big-bearded man start back quickly as if he had received a swift, noiseless blow.

Then some twinkling points of fire appeared in the distance along the road. It was Tôtes. They had traveled eleven hours, which, with the two hours given to resting and feeding the horses, made thirteen. They entered the town and stopped before the Hotel of Commerce.

The carriage door opened! A well-known sound gave the travelers a start; it was the scabbard of a sword hitting the ground. Immediately a German voice was heard in the darkness.

Although the diligence was not moving, no one offered to alight, fearing someone might be waiting to murder them as they stepped out. Then the conductor appeared, holding in his hand one of the lanterns which lighted the carriage to its depth and showed the two rows of frightened faces whose mouths were open and whose eyes were wide with surprise and fear.

Outside, beside the driver, in plain sight stood a German officer, an excessively tall young man, thin and blond, squeezed into his

uniform like a girl in a corset and wearing on his head a flat oilcloth cap which made him resemble the porter of an English hotel. His enormous mustache, of long straight hairs, growing gradually thin at each side and terminating in a single blond thread so fine that one could not perceive where it ended, seemed to weigh heavily on the corners of his mouth and, drawing down the cheeks, left a decided wrinkle about the lips.

In Alsatian French he invited the travelers to come in, saying in a suave tone: "Will you descend, gentlemen and ladies?"

The two good sisters were the first to obey, with the docility of saints accustomed ever to submission. The count and countess then appeared, followed by the manufacturer and his wife; then Loiseau, pushing ahead of him his larger half. The last named, as he set foot on the earth, said to the officer: "Good evening, sir," more as a measure of prudence than politeness. The officer, insolent as all powerful people usually are, looked at him without a word.

Ball-of-Fat and Cornudet, although nearest the door, were the last to descend, grave and haughty before the enemy. The fat girl tried to control herself and be calm. The democrat waved a tragic hand, and his long beard seemed to tremble a little and grow redder. They wished to preserve their dignity, comprehending that in such meetings as these they represented in some degree their great country; and somewhat disgusted with the docility of her companions, the fat girl tried to show more pride than her neighbors, the honest women, and as she felt that someone should set an example she continued her attitude of resistance assumed at the beginning of the journey.

They entered the vast kitchen of the inn, and the German, having demanded their traveling papers signed by the general in chief (in which the name, the description and profession of each traveler was mentioned) and having examined them all critically, comparing the people and their signatures, said: "It is quite right," and went out.

Then they breathed. They were still hungry and supper was ordered. A half-hour was necessary to prepare it, and while two servants were attending to this they went to their rooms. They found them along a corridor which terminated in a large glazed door.

Finally they sat down at table, when the proprietor of the inn himself appeared. He was a former horse merchant, a large, asthmatic man with a constant wheezing and rattling in his throat. His father had left him the name of Follenvie. He asked:

"Is Miss Elizabeth Rousset here?"

Ball-of-Fat started as she answered: "It is I."

"The Prussian officer wishes to speak with you immediately."

"With me?"

"Yes, that is, if you are Miss Elizabeth Rousset."

She was disturbed and, reflecting for an instant, declared flatly:

"That is my name, but I shall not go."

A stir was felt around her; each discussed and tried to think of the cause of this order. The count approached her, saying:

"You are wrong, madame, for your refusal may lead to considerable difficulty, not only for yourself but for all your companions. It is never worth while to resist those in power. This request cannot assuredly bring any danger; it is, without doubt, about some forgotten formality."

Everybody agreed with him, asking, begging, beseeching her to go, and at last they convinced her that it was best; they all feared the complications that might result from disobedience. She finally said:

"It is for you that I do this, you understand."

The countess took her by the hand, saying: "And we are grateful to you for it."

She went out. They waited before sitting down at table.

Each one regretted not having been sent for in the place of this violent, irascible girl and mentally prepared some platitudes in case they should be called in their turn.

But at the end of ten minutes, she reappeared, out of breath, red to suffocation and exasperated. She stammered: "Oh! the rascal; the rascal!"

All gathered around to learn something, but she said nothing; and when the count insisted she responded with great dignity: "No, it does not concern you; I can say nothing."

Then they all seated themselves around a high soup tureen whence came the odor of cabbage. In spite of alarm the supper was gay. The cider was good; the beverage Loiseau and the good sisters took as a means of economy. The others called for wine; Cornudet demanded beer. He had a special fashion of uncorking the bottle, making froth on the liquid, carefully filling the glass and then holding it before the light to better appreciate the color. When he drank, his great beard, which still kept some of the foam of his beloved beverage, seemed to tremble with tenderness; his eyes were squinted, in order not to lose sight of his tipple, and he had the unique air of fulfilling the function for which he was born. One would say that there was in his mind a meeting, like that of affinities, between the two great passions that occupied his life—Pale Ale and Revolutions; and assuredly he could not taste the one without thinking of the other.

M. and Mme Follenvie dined at the end of the table. The man, rattling like a cracked locomotive, had too much trouble in breathing

to talk while eating, but his wife was never silent. She told all her impressions at the arrival of the Prussians, what they did, what they said, reviling them because they cost her some money and because she had two sons in the army. She addressed herself especially to the countess, flattered by being able to talk with a lady of quality.

When she lowered her voice to say some delicate thing her husband would interrupt, from time to time, with: "You had better keep silent, Madame Follenvie." But she paid no attention, continuing in this fashion:

"Yes, madame, those people there not only eat our potatoes and pork but our pork and potatoes. And it must not be believed that they are at all proper—oh no! Such filthy things they do, saving the respect I owe to you! And if you could see them exercise for hours in the day! They are all there in the field, marching ahead, then marching back, turning here and turning there. They might be cultivating the land or at least working on the roads of their own country! But no, madame, these military men are profitable to no one. Poor people have to feed them or perhaps be murdered! I am only an old woman without education, it is true, but when I see some endangering their constitutions by raging from morning to night I say: 'When there are so many people found to be useless, how unnecessary it is for others to take so much trouble to be nuisances!' Truly, is it not an abomination to kill people, whether they be Prussian or English or Polish or French? If one man revenges himself upon another who has done him some injury, it is wicked and he is punished; but when they exterminate our boys as if they were game, with guns, they give decorations, indeed, to the one who destroys the most! Now, you see, I can never understand that, never!"

Cornudet raised his voice: "War is a barbarity when one attacks a peaceable neighbor but a sacred duty when one defends his country."

The old woman lowered her head.

"Yes, when one defends himself it is another thing; but why not make it a duty to kill all the kings who make these wars for their pleasure?"

Cornudet's eyes flashed. "Bravo, my countrywoman!" said he.

M. Carré-Lamadon reflected profoundly. Although he was prejudiced as a captain of industry, the good sense of this peasant woman made him think of the opulence that would be brought into the country were the idle and consequently mischievous hands, and the troops which were now maintained in unproductiveness, employed in some great industrial work that it would require centuries to achieve.

Loiseau, leaving his place, went to speak with the innkeeper in a low tone of voice. The great man laughed, shook and squeaked, his corpulence quivered with joy at the jokes of his neighbor, and he bought of him six cases of wine for spring, after the Prussians had gone.

As soon as supper was finished, as they were worn out with fatigue, they retired.

However, Loiseau, who had observed things, after getting his wife to bed glued his eye and then his ear to a hole in the wall to try and discover what are known as "the mysteries of the corridor."

At the end of about an hour he heard a groping and, looking quickly, he perceived Ball-of-Fat, who appeared still more plump in a blue cashmere negligee trimmed with white lace. She had a candle in her hand and was directing her steps toward the great door at the end of the corridor. But a door at the side opened, and when she returned at the end of some minutes Cornudet, in his suspenders, followed her. They spoke low, then they stopped. Ball-of-Fat seemed to be defending the entrance to her room with energy. Loiseau, unfortunately, could not hear all their words, but finally, as they raised their voices, he was able to catch a few. Cornudet insisted with vivacity. He said:

"Come, now, you are a silly woman; what harm can be done?"

She had an indignant air in responding: "No, my dear, there are moments when such things are out of place. Here it would be a shame."

He doubtless did not comprehend and asked why. Then she cried out, raising her voice still more:

"Why? You do not see why? When there are Prussians in the house, in the very next room, perhaps?"

He was silent. This patriotic shame of the harlot, who would not suffer his caress so near the enemy, must have awakened the latent dignity in his heart, for after simply kissing her he went back to his own door with a bound.

Loiseau, much excited, left the aperture, cut a caper in his room, put on his pajamas, turned back the clothes that covered the bony carcass of his companion, whom he awakened with a kiss, murmuring: "Do you love me, dearie?"

Then all the house was still. And immediately there arose somewhere, from an uncertain quarter which might be the cellar but was quite as likely to be the garret, a powerful snoring, monotonous and regular, a heavy, prolonged sound, like a great kettle under pressure. M. Follenvie was asleep.

As they had decided that they would set out at eight o'clock the

next morning, they all collected in the kitchen. But the carriage, the roof of which was covered with snow, stood undisturbed in the courtyard, without horses and without a conductor. They sought him in vain in the stables, in the hay and in the coach house. Then they resolved to scour the town and started out. They found themselves in a square, with a church at one end and some low houses on either side, where they perceived some Prussian soldiers. The first one they saw was paring potatoes. The second, further off, was cleaning the hairdresser's shop. Another, bearded to the eyes, was tending a troublesome brat, cradling it and trying to appease it; and the great peasant women, whose husbands were "away in the army," indicated by signs to their obedient conquerors the work they wished to have done: cutting wood, cooking the soup, grinding the coffee or what not. One of them even washed the linen of his hostess, an impotent old grandmother.

The count, astonished, asked questions of the beadle who came out of the rectory. The old man responded:

"Oh! those men are not wicked; they are not the Prussians we hear about. They are from far off, I know not where; and they have left wives and children in their country; it is not amusing to them, this war, I can tell you! I am sure they also weep for their homes and that it makes as much sorrow among them as it does among us. Here, now, there is not so much unhappiness for the moment, because the soldiers do no harm and they work as if they were in their own homes. You see, sir, among poor people it is necessary that they aid one another. These are the great traits which war develops."

Cornudet, indignant at the cordial relations between the conquerors and the conquered, preferred to shut himself up in the inn. Loiseau had a joke for the occasion: "They will repeople the land."

M. Carré-Lamadon had a serious word: "They try to make amends."

But they did not find the driver. Finally they discovered him in a café of the village, sitting at table fraternally with the officer of ordnance. The count called out to him:

"Were you not ordered to be ready at eight o'clock?"

"Well, yes; but another order has been given me since."

"By whom?"

"Faith! the Prussian commander."

"What was it?"

"Not to harness at all."

"Why?"

"I know nothing about it. Go and ask him. They tell me not to harness, and I don't harness. That's all."

"Did he give you the order himself?"

"No sir, the innkeeper gave the order for him."

"When was that?"

"Last evening, as I was going to bed."

The three men returned, much disturbed. They asked for M. Follenvie, but the servant answered that that gentleman, because of his asthma, never rose before ten o'clock. And he had given strict orders not to be wakened before that, except in case of fire.

They wished to see the officer, but that was absolutely impossible since, while he lodged at the inn, M. Follenvie alone was authorized to speak to him upon civil affairs. So they waited. The women went up to their rooms again and occupied themselves with futile tasks.

Cornudet installed himself near the great chimney in the kitchen, where there was a good fire burning. He ordered one of the little tables to be brought from the café, then a can of beer; he then drew out his pipe, which plays among democrats a part almost equal to his own, because in serving Cornudet it was serving its country. It was a superb pipe, an admirably colored meerschaum, as black as the teeth of its master, but perfumed, curved, glistening, easy to the hand, completing his physiognomy. And he remained motionless, his eyes as much fixed upon the flame of the fire as upon his favorite tippie and its frothy crown; and each time that he drank he passed his long thin fingers through his scanty gray hair with an air of satisfaction, after which he sucked in his mustache fringed with foam.

Loiseau, under the pretext of stretching his legs, went to place some wine among the retailers of the country. The count and the manufacturer began to talk politics. They could foresee the future of France. One of them believed in an Orléans, the other in some unknown savior for the country, a hero who would reveal himself when all were in despair: a Guesclin or a Joan of Arc, perhaps, or would it be another Napoleon First? Ah! if the Prince Imperial were not so young!

Cornudet listened to them and smiled like one who holds the word of destiny. His pipe perfumed the kitchen.

As ten o'clock struck M. Follenvie appeared. They asked him hurried questions, but he could only repeat two or three times, without variation, these words:

"The officer said to me: Monsieur Follenvie, you see to it that the carriage is not harnessed for those travelers tomorrow. I do not wish them to leave without my order. That is sufficient."

Then they wished to see the officer. The count sent him his card, on which M. Carré-Lamadon wrote his name and all his titles. The Prussian sent back word that he would meet the two gentle-

men after he had breakfasted, that is to say, about one o'clock.

The ladies reappeared and ate a little something, despite their disquiet. Ball-of-Fat seemed ill and prodigiously troubled.

They were finishing their coffee when the word came that the officer was ready to meet the gentlemen. Loiseau joined them; but when they tried to enlist Cornudet, to give more solemnity to their proceedings, he declared proudly that he would have nothing to do with the Germans, and he betook himself to his chimney corner and ordered another liter of beer.

The three men mounted the staircase and were introduced to the best room of the inn, where the officer received them, stretched out in an armchair, his feet on the mantelpiece, smoking a long porcelain pipe and enveloped in a flamboyant dressing gown, appropriated, without doubt, from some dwelling belonging to a common citizen of bad taste. He did not rise nor greet them in any way, not even looking at them. It was a magnificent display of natural blackguardism transformed into the military victor.

At the expiration of some moments he asked: "What is it you wish?"

The count became spokesman: "We desire to go on our way, sir."
"No."

"May I ask the cause of this refusal?"

"Because I do not wish it."

"But I would respectfully observe to you, sir, that your general in chief gave us permission to go to Dieppe, and I know of nothing we have done to merit your severity."

"I do not wish it—that is all; you can go."

All three, having bowed, retired.

The afternoon was lamentable. They could not understand this caprice of the German, and the most singular ideas would come into their heads to trouble them. Everybody stayed in the kitchen and discussed the situation endlessly, imagining all sorts of unlikely things. Perhaps they would be retained as hostages—but to what end?—or taken prisoners—or rather a considerable ransom might be demanded. At this thought a panic prevailed. The richest were the most frightened, already seeing themselves constrained to pay for their lives with sacks of gold poured into the hands of this insolent soldier. They racked their brains to think of some acceptable falsehoods to conceal their riches and make them pass themselves off for poor people, very poor people. Loiseau took off the chain to his watch and hid it away in his pocket. The falling night increased their apprehensions. The lamp was lighted, and as there was still two hours before dinner, Mme Loiseau proposed a game of thirty-one. It

would be a diversion. They accepted. Cornudet himself, having smoked out his pipe, took part for politeness.

The count shuffled the cards, dealt, and Ball-of-Fat had thirty-one at the outset; and immediately the interest was great enough to appease the fear that haunted their minds. Then Cornudet perceived that the house of Loiseau was given to tricks.

As they were going to the dinner table, M. Follenvie again appeared and in wheezing, rattling voice announced:

"The Prussian officer orders me to ask Miss Elizabeth Rousset if she has yet changed her mind."

Ball-of-Fat remained standing and was pale; then, suddenly becoming crimson, such a stifling anger took possession of her that she could not speak. But finally she flashed out: "You may say to the dirty beast, that idiot, that carrion of a Prussian, that I shall never change it; you understand, never, never, never!"

The great innkeeper went out. Then Ball-of-Fat was immediately surrounded, questioned and solicited by all to disclose the mystery of his visit. She resisted at first, but soon, becoming exasperated, she said: "What does he want? You really want to know what he wants? He wants to sleep with me."

Everybody was choked for words, and indignation was rife. Cornudet broke his glass, so violently did he bring his fist down upon the table. There was a clamor of censure against this ignoble soldier, a blast of anger, a union of all for resistance, as if a demand had been made on each one of the party for the sacrifice exacted of her. The count declared with disgust that those people conducted themselves after the fashion of the ancient barbarians. The women, especially, showed to Ball-of-Fat a most energetic and tender commiseration. The good sisters, who only showed themselves at mealtime, lowered their heads and said nothing.

They all dined, nevertheless, when the first furors had abated. But there was little conversation; they were thinking.

The ladies retired early, and the men, all smoking, organized a game of cards to which M. Follenvie was invited, as they intended to put a few casual questions to him on the subject of conquering the resistance of this officer. But he thought of nothing but the cards and, without listening or answering, would keep repeating: "To the game, sirs, to the game." His attention was so taken that he even forgot to expectorate, which must have put him some points to the good with the organ in his breast. His whistling lungs ran the whole asthmatic scale, from deep, profound tones to the sharp rustiness of a young cock essaying to crow.

He even refused to retire when his wife, who had fallen asleep

previously, came to look for him. She went away alone, for she was an "early bird," always up with the sun, while her husband was a "night owl," always ready to pass the night with his friends. He cried out to her: "Leave my creamed chicken before the fire!" and then went on with his game. When they saw that they could get nothing from him they declared that it was time to stop, and each sought his bed.

They all rose rather early the next day, with an undefined hope of getting away, which desire the terror of passing another day in that horrible inn greatly increased.

Alas! the horses remained in the stable and the driver was invisible. For want of better employment they went out and walked around the carriage.

The breakfast was very doleful, and it became apparent that a coldness had arisen toward Ball-of-Fat and that the night, which brings counsel, had slightly modified their judgments. They almost wished now that the Prussian had secretly found this girl, in order to give her companions a pleasant surprise in the morning. What could be more simple? Besides, who would know anything about it? She could save appearances by telling the officer that she took pity on their distress. To her it would make so little difference!

No one had avowed these thoughts yet.

In the afternoon, as they were almost perishing from ennui, the count proposed that they take a walk around the village. Each wrapped up warmly and the little party set out, with the exception of Cornudet who preferred to remain near the fire, and the good sisters, who passed their time in the church or at the curate's.

The cold, growing more intense every day, cruelly pinched their noses and ears; their feet became so numb that each step was torture; and when they came to a field it seemed to them frightfully sad under this limitless white, so that everybody returned immediately, with hearts hard pressed and souls congealed.

The four women walked ahead, the three gentlemen followed just behind. Loiseau, who understood the situation, asked suddenly if they thought that girl there was going to keep them long in such a place as this. The count, always courteous, said that they could not exact from a woman a sacrifice so hard, unless it should come of her own will. M. Carré-Lamadon remarked that if the French made their return through Dieppe, as they were likely to, a battle would surely take place at Tôtes. This reflection made the two others anxious.

"If we could only get away on foot," said Loiseau.

The count shrugged his shoulders. "How can we think of it in this

snow and with our wives?" he said. "And then we should be pursued and caught in ten minutes and led back prisoners at the mercy of these soldiers."

It was true, and they were silent.

The ladies talked of their clothes, but a certain constraint seemed to disunite them. Suddenly at the end of the street the officer appeared. His tall wasplike figure in uniform was outlined upon the horizon formed by the snow, and he was marching with knees apart, a gait particularly military, which is affected that they may not spot their carefully blackened boots.

He bowed in passing near the ladies and looked disdainfully at the men, who preserved their dignity by not seeing him, except Loiseau, who made a motion toward raising his hat.

Ball-of-Fat reddened to the ears, and the three married women resented the great humiliation of being thus met by this soldier in the company of this girl whom he had treated so cavalierly.

But they spoke of him, of his figure and his face. Mme Carré-Lamadon, who had known many officers and considered herself a connoisseur of them, found this one not at all bad; she regretted even that he was not French, because he would make such a pretty hussar, one all the women would rave over.

Again in the house, no one knew what to do. Some sharp words, even, were said about things very insignificant. The dinner was silent, and almost immediately after it each one went to his room to kill time in sleep.

They descended the next morning with weary faces and exasperated hearts. The women scarcely spoke to Ball-of-Fat.

A bell began to ring. It was for a baptism. The fat girl had a child being brought up among the peasants of Yvetot. She had not seen it for a year or thought of it; but now the idea of a child being baptized threw into her heart a sudden and violent tenderness for her own, and she strongly wished to be present at the ceremony.

As soon as she was gone everybody looked at each other, then pulled their chairs together, for they thought that finally something should be decided upon. Loiseau had an inspiration: it was to hold Ball-of-Fat alone and let the others go.

M. Follenvie was charged with the commission but he returned almost immediately, for the German, who understood human nature, had put him out. He pretended that he would retain everybody so long as his desire was not satisfied.

Then the commonplace nature of Mme Loiseau burst out with: "Well, we are not going to stay here to die of old age. Since it is

the trade of this creature to accommodate herself to all kinds, I fail to see how she has the right to refuse one more than another. I can tell you she has received all she could find in Rouen, even the coachmen! Yes, madame, the prefect's coachman! I know him very well, for he bought his wine at our house. And to think that today we should be drawn into this embarrassment by this affected woman, this minx! For my part, I find that this officer conducts himself very well. He has perhaps suffered privations for a long time, and doubtless he would have preferred us three; but no, he is contented with common property. He respects married women. And we must remember too that he is master. He has only to say 'I wish,' and he could take us by force with his soldiers."

The two women had a cold shiver. Pretty Mme Carré-Lamadon's eyes grew brilliant and she became a little pale, as if she saw herself already taken by force by the officer.

The men met and discussed the situation. Loiseau, furious, was for delivering "the wretch" bound hand and foot to the enemy. But the count, descended through three generations of ambassadors and endowed with the temperament of a diplomatist, was the advocate of ingenuity.

"It is best to decide upon something," said he. Then they conspired.

The women kept together, the tone of their voices was lowered, each gave advice and the discussion was general. Everything was very harmonious. The ladies, especially, found delicate shades and charming subtleties of expression for saying the most unusual things. A stranger would have understood nothing, so great was the precaution of language observed. But the light edge of modesty with which every woman of the world is barbed only covers the surface; they blossom out in a scandalous adventure of this kind, being deeply amused and feeling themselves in their element, mixing love with sensuality as a greedy cook prepares supper for his master.

Even gaiety returned, so funny did the whole story seem to them at last. The count found some of the jokes a little off color, but they were so well told that he was forced to smile. In his turn Loiseau came out with some still bolder tales, and yet nobody was wounded. The brutal thought expressed by his wife dominated all minds: "Since it is her trade, why should she refuse this one more than another?" The genteel Mme Carré-Lamadon seemed to think that in her place she would refuse this one less than some others.

They prepared the blockade at length, as if they were about to surround a fortress. Each took some role to play, some arguments

he would bring to bear, some maneuvers that he would endeavor to put into execution. They decided on the plan of attack, the ruse to employ, the surprise of assault that should force this living citadel to receive the enemy in her room.

Cornudet remained apart from the rest and was a stranger to the whole affair.

So entirely were their minds distracted that they did not hear Ball-of-Fat enter. The count uttered a light "Ssh!" which turned all eyes in her direction. There she was. The abrupt silence and a certain embarrassment hindered them from speaking to her at first. The countess, more accustomed to the duplicity of society than the others, finally inquired:

"Was it very amusing, that baptism?"

The fat girl, filled with emotion, told them all about it: the faces, the attitudes and even the appearance of the church. She added: "It is good to pray sometimes."

And up to the time for luncheon these ladies continued to be amiable toward her in order to increase her docility and her confidence in their counsel. At the table they commenced the approach. This was in the shape of a vague conversation upon devotion. They cited ancient examples: Judith and Holophernes, then, without reason, Lucrece and Sextus, and Cleopatra obliging all the generals of the enemy to pass by her couch and reducing them in servility to slaves. Then they brought out a fantastic story, hatched in the imagination of these ignorant millionaires, where the women of Rome went to Capua for the purpose of lulling Hannibal to sleep in their arms and his lieutenants and phalanxes of mercenaries as well. They cited all the women who had been taken by conquering armies, making a battlefield of their bodies, making them also a weapon and a means of success; and all those hideous and detestable beings who have conquered by their heroic caresses and sacrificed their chastity to vengeance or a beloved cause. They even spoke in veiled terms of that great English family which allowed one of its women to be inoculated with a horrible and contagious disease in order to transmit it to Bonaparte, who was miraculously saved by a sudden illness at the hour of the fatal rendezvous.

And all this was related in an agreeable, temperate fashion, except as it was enlivened by the enthusiasm deemed proper to excite emulation.

One might finally have believed that the sole duty of woman here below was a sacrifice of her person and a continual abandonment to soldierly caprices.

The two good sisters seemed not to hear, lost as they were in profound thought. Ball-of-Fat said nothing.

During the whole afternoon they let her reflect. But in the place of calling her "Madame," as they had up to this time, they simply called her "Mademoiselle" without knowing exactly why, as if they had a desire to put her down a degree in their esteem, which she had taken by storm, and make her feel her shameful situation.

The moment supper was served M. Follenvie appeared with his old phrase: "The Prussian officer orders me to ask if Miss Elizabeth Rousset has yet changed her mind."

Ball-of-Fat responded dryly: "No sir."

But at dinner the coalition weakened. Loiseau made three unhappy remarks. Each one beat his wits for new examples but found nothing; then the countess, without premeditation, perhaps feeling some vague need of rendering homage to religion, asked the elder of the good sisters to tell them some great deeds in the lives of the saints. It appeared that many of their acts would have been considered crimes in our eyes, but the Church gave absolution of them readily, since they were done for the glory of God or for the good of all. It was a powerful argument; the countess made the most of it.

Thus it may be by one of those tacit understandings, or the veiled complacency in which anyone who wears the ecclesiastical garb excels, it may be simply from the effect of a happy unintelligence, a helpful stupidity, but in fact the religious sister lent a formidable support to the conspiracy. They had thought her timid, but she showed herself courageous, verbose, even violent. She was not troubled by the chatter of the casuist; her doctrine seemed a bar of iron; her faith never hesitated; her conscience had no scruples. She found the sacrifice of Abraham perfectly simple, for she would immediately kill father or mother on an order from on high. And nothing, in her opinion, could displease the Lord if the intention was laudable. The countess put to use the authority of her unwitting accomplice and added to it the edifying paraphrase and axiom of Jesuit morals: "The need justifies the means."

Then she asked her: "Then, my sister, do you think that God accepts intentions and pardons the deed when the motive is pure?"

"Who could doubt it, madame? An action blamable in itself often becomes meritorious by the thought it springs from."

And they continued thus, unraveling the will of God, foreseeing his decisions, making themselves interested in things that, in truth, they would never think of noticing. All this was guarded, skillful, discreet. But each word of the saintly sister in a cap helped to break down the resistance of the unworthy courtesan. Then the conversation changed

a little, the woman of the chaplet speaking of the houses of her order, of her Superior, of herself, of her dainty neighbor, the dear sister Saint Nicephore. They had been called to the hospitals of Havre to care for the hundreds of soldiers stricken with smallpox. They depicted these miserable creatures, giving details of the malady. And while they were stopped, en route, by the caprice of this Prussian officer, a great number of Frenchmen might die whom perhaps they could have saved! It was a specialty with her, caring for soldiers. She had been in Crimea, in Italy, in Austria, and in telling of her campaigns she revealed herself as one of those religious aids to drums and trumpets who seem made to follow camps, pick up the wounded in the thick of battle and, better than an officer, subdue with a word great bands of undisciplined recruits. A true good sister of the rataplan, whose ravaged face, marked with innumerable scars, appeared the image of the devastation of war.

No one could speak after her, so excellent seemed the effect of her words.

As soon as the repast was ended they quickly went up to their rooms, with the purpose of not coming down the next day until late in the morning.

The luncheon was quiet. They had given the grain of seed time to germinate and bear fruit. The countess proposed that they take a walk in the afternoon. The count, being agreeably inclined, gave an arm to Ball-of-Fat and walked behind the others with her. He talked to her in a familiar, paternal tone, a little disdainful, after the manner of men having girls in their employ, calling her "my dear child," from the height of his social position, of his undisputed honor. He reached the vital part of the question at once:

"Then you prefer to leave us here, exposed to the violences which follow a defeat, rather than consent to a favor which you have so often given in your life?"

Ball-of-Fat answered nothing.

Then he tried to reach her through gentleness, reason, and then the sentiments. He knew how to remain "the count," even while showing himself gallant or complimentary or very amiable if it became necessary. He exalted the service that she would render them and spoke of his appreciation, then suddenly became gaily familiar and said:

"And you know, my dear, it would be something for him to boast of that he had known a pretty girl; something it is difficult to find in his country."

Ball-of-Fat did not answer but joined the rest of the party. As soon as they entered the house she went to her room and did not appear

again. The disquiet was extreme. What were they to do? If she continued to resist, what an embarrassment!

The dinner hour struck. They waited in vain. M. Follenvie finally entered and said that Miss Rousset was indisposed and would not be at the table. Everybody pricked up his ears. The count went to the innkeeper and said in a low voice:

"Is he in there?"

"Yes."

For convenience he said nothing to his companions but made a slight sign with his head. Immediately a great sigh of relief went up from every breast and a light appeared in their faces. Loiseau cried out:

"Holy Christopher! I pay for the champagne, if there is any to be found in the establishment." And Mme Loiseau was pained to see the proprietor return with four quart bottles in his hands.

Each one had suddenly become communicative and buoyant. A wanton joy filled their hearts. The count suddenly perceived that Mme Carré-Lamadon was charming, the manufacturer paid compliments to the countess. The conversation was lively, gay, full of touches.

Suddenly Loiseau, with anxious face and hand upraised, called out: "Silence!" Everybody was silent, surprised, already frightened. Then he listened intently and said: "S-s-sh!" his two eyes and his hands raised toward the ceiling, listening, and then continuing in his natural voice: "All right! All goes well!"

They failed to comprehend at first, but soon all laughed. At the end of a quarter of an hour he began the same farce again, renewing it occasionally during the whole afternoon. And he pretended to call to someone in the story above, giving him advice in a double meaning, drawn from the fountainhead—the mind of a commercial traveler. For some moments he would assume a sad air, breathing in a whisper: "Poor girl!" Then he would murmur between his teeth, with an appearance of rage: "Ugh! That scamp of a Prussian." Sometimes, at a moment when no more was thought about it, he would say in an affected voice, many times over: "Enough! enough!" and add, as if speaking to himself: "If we could only see her again; it isn't necessary that he should kill her, the wretch!"

Although these jokes were in deplorable taste they amused all and wounded no one, for indignation, like other things, depends upon its surroundings, and the atmosphere which had been gradually created around them was charged with sensual thoughts.

At the dessert the women themselves made some delicate and discreet allusions. Their eyes glistened; they had drunk much. The

count, who preserved even in his flights his grand appearance of gravity, made a comparison, much relished, upon the subject of those wintering at the Pole, and the joy of shipwrecked sailors who saw an opening toward the south.

Loiseau suddenly arose, a glass of champagne in his hand, and said: "I drink to our deliverance." Everybody was on his feet; they shouted in agreement. Even the two good sisters consented to touch their lips to the froth of the wine which they had never before tasted. They declared that it tasted like charged lemonade, only much nicer.

Loiseau resumed: "It is unfortunate that we have no piano, for we might make up a quadrille."

Cornudet had not said a word nor made a gesture; he appeared plunged in very grave thoughts and made sometimes a furious motion, so that his great beard seemed to wish to free itself. Finally, toward midnight, as they were separating, Loiseau, who was staggering, touched him suddenly on the stomach and said to him in a stammer: "You are not very funny this evening; you have said nothing, citizen!" Then Cornudet raised his head brusquely and, casting a brilliant, terrible glance around the company, said: "I tell you all that you have been guilty of infamy!" He rose, went to the door and again repeated: "Infamy, I say!" and disappeared.

This made a coldness at first. Loiseau, interlocutor, was stupefied; but he recovered immediately and laughed heartily as he said: "He is very green, my friends. He is very green." And then, as they did not comprehend, he told them about the "mysteries of the corridor." Then there was a return of gaiety. The women behaved like lunatics. The count and M. Carré-Lamadon wept from the force of their laughter. They could not believe it.

"How is that? Are you sure?"

"I tell you I saw it."

"And she refused——"

"Yes, because the Prussian officer was in the next room."

"Impossible!"

"I swear it!"

The count was stifled with laughter. The industrial gentleman held his sides with both hands. Loiseau continued:

"And now you understand why he saw nothing funny this evening! No, nothing at all!" And the three started out half ill, suffocated.

They separated. But Mme Loiseau, who was of a spiteful nature, remarked to her husband as they were getting into bed that "that grisette" of a little Carré-Lamadon was yellow with envy all the evening. "You know," she continued, "how some women will take

to a uniform, whether it be French or Prussian. It is all the same to them. Oh, what a pity!"

And all night, in the darkness of the corridor, there were to be heard light noises like whisperings and walking in bare feet and imperceptible creakings. They did not go to sleep until late, that is sure, for there were threads of light shining under the doors for a long time. The champagne had its effect; they say it troubles sleep.

The next day a clear winter's sun made the snow very brilliant. The diligence, already harnessed, waited before the door while an army of white pigeons, in their thick plumage, with rose-colored eyes with a black spot in the center, walked up and down gravely among the legs of the six horses, seeking their livelihood in the manure there scattered.

The driver, enveloped in his sheepskin, had a lighted pipe under the seat, and all the travelers, radiant, were rapidly packing some provisions for the rest of the journey. They were only waiting for Ball-of-Fat. Finally she appeared.

She seemed a little troubled, ashamed. And she advanced timidly toward her companions, who all, with one motion, turned as if they had not seen her. The count, with dignity, took the arm of his wife and removed her from this impure contact.

The fat girl stopped, half stupefied; then, plucking up courage, she approached the manufacturer's wife with "Good morning, madame," humbly murmured. The lady made a slight bow of the head which she accompanied with a look of outraged virtue. Everybody seemed busy and kept themselves as far from her as if she had had some infectious disease in her skirts. Then they hurried into the carriage, where she came last, alone, and where she took the place she had occupied during the first part of the journey.

✓ They seemed not to see her or know her; although Mme Loiseau, looking at her from afar, said to her husband in a half tone: "Happily, I don't have to sit beside her."

* The heavy carriage began to move, and the remainder of the journey commenced. No one spoke at first. Ball-of-Fat dared not raise her eyes. She felt indignant toward all her neighbors and at the same time humiliated at having yielded to the foul kisses of this Prussian into whose arms they had hypocritically thrown her.

Then the countess, turning toward Mme Carré-Lamadon, broke the difficult silence:

"I believe you know Madame d'Etrelles?"

"Yes, she is one of my friends."

"What a charming woman!"

"Delightful! A very gentle nature and well educated besides; then

she is an artist to the tips of her fingers, sings beautifully and draws to perfection."

The manufacturer chatted with the count, and in the midst of the rattling of the glass an occasional word escaped such as "coupon—premium—limit—expiration."

Loiseau, who had pilfered the old pack of cards from the inn, greasy through five years of contact with tables badly cleaned, began a game of bezique with his wife.

The good sisters took from their belt the long rosary which hung there, made together the sign of the cross and suddenly began to move their lips in a lively murmur, as if they were going through the whole of the "Oremus." And from time to time they kissed a medal, made the sign anew, then recommenced their muttering, which was rapid and continued.

Cornudet sat motionless, thinking.

At the end of three hours on the way, Loiseau put up the cards and said: "I am hungry."

His wife drew out a package from whence she brought a piece of cold veal. She cut it evenly in thin pieces and they both began to eat.

"Suppose we do the same," said the countess.

They consented to it and she undid the provisions prepared for the two couples. It was in one of those dishes whose lid is decorated with a china hare to signify that a *pâté of hare* is inside, a succulent dish of pork, where white rivers of lard cross the brown flesh of the game, mixed with some other viands hashed fine. A beautiful square of Gruyère cheese, wrapped in a piece of newspaper, preserved the imprint "divers things" upon the unctuous plate.

The two good sisters unrolled a big sausage which smelled of garlic, and Cornudet plunged his two hands into the vast pockets of his overcoat at the same time and drew out four hard eggs and a piece of bread. He removed the shells and threw them in the straw under his feet; then he began to eat the eggs, letting fall on his vast beard some bits of clear yellow which looked like stars caught there.

Ball-of-Fat, in the haste and distraction of her rising, had not thought of anything; and she looked at them exasperated, suffocating with rage at all of them eating so placidly. A tumultuous anger swept over her at first, and she opened her mouth to cry out at them, to hurl at them a flood of injury which mounted to her lips; but she could not speak, her exasperation strangled her.

No one looked at her or thought of her. She felt herself drowned in the scorn of these honest scoundrels who had first sacrificed her and then rejected her, like some improper or useless article. She thought

of her great basketful of good things they had greedily devoured, of her two chickens shining with jelly, of her *pâtés*, her pears and the four bottles of Bordeaux; and her fury suddenly falling, as a cord drawn too tightly breaks, she felt ready to weep. She made terrible efforts to prevent it, making ugly faces, swallowing her sobs as children do; but the tears came and glistened in the corners of her eyes, and then two great drops, detaching themselves from the rest, rolled slowly down like little streams of water that filter through rock and, falling regularly, rebounded upon her breast. She sits erect, her eyes fixed, her face rigid and pale, hoping that no one will notice her.

But the countess perceives her and tells her husband by a sign. He shrugs his shoulders, as much as to say:

"What would you have me do? It is not my fault."

Mme Loiseau indulged in a mute laugh of triumph and murmured: "She weeps for shame."

The two good sisters began to pray again, after having wrapped in a paper the remainder of their sausage.

Then Cornudet, who was digesting his eggs, extended his legs to the seat opposite, crossed them, folded his arms, smiled like a man who is watching a good farce and began to whistle the "Marseillaise."

All faces grew dark. The popular song assuredly did not please his neighbors. They became nervous and agitated, having an appearance of wishing to howl, like dogs when they hear a barbarous organ. He perceived this but did not stop. Sometimes he would hum the words:

*"Sacred love of country
Help, sustain th' avenging arm;
Liberty, sweet Liberty,
Ever fight, with no alarm."*

They traveled fast, the snow being harder. But as far as Dieppe, during the long sad hours of the journey, across the jolts in the road, through the falling night, in the profound darkness of the carriage, he continued his vengeful, monotonous whistling with a ferocious obstinacy, constraining his neighbors to follow the song from one end to the other and to recall the words that belonged to each measure.

And Ball-of-Fat wept continually, and sometimes a sob, which she was not able to restrain, echoed between the two rows of people in the shadows.

THE NECKLACE

SHE WAS one of those pretty, charming young ladies, born, as if through an error of destiny, into a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no hopes, no means of becoming known, appreciated, loved and married by a man either rich or distinguished; and she allowed herself to marry a petty clerk in the office of the Board of Education.

She was simple, not being able to adorn herself, but she was unhappy, as one out of her class; for women belong to no caste, no race, their grace, their beauty and their charm serving them in the place of birth and family. Their inborn finesse, their instinctive elegance, their suppleness of wit, are their only aristocracy, making some daughters of the people the equal of great ladies.

She suffered incessantly, feeling herself born for all delicacies and luxuries. She suffered from the poverty of her apartment, the shabby walls, the worn chairs and the faded stuffs. All these things, which another woman of her station would not have noticed, tortured and angered her. The sight of the little Breton, who made this humble home, awoke in her sad regrets and desperate dreams. She thought of quiet antechambers with their oriental hangings lighted by high bronze torches and of the two great footmen in short trousers who sleep in the large armchairs, made sleepy by the heavy air from the heating apparatus. She thought of large drawing rooms hung in old silks, of graceful pieces of furniture carrying bric-a-brac of inestimable value and of the little perfumed coquettish apartments made for five o'clock chats with most intimate friends, men known and sought after, whose attention all women envied and desired.

When she seated herself for dinner before the round table, where the tablecloth had been used three days, opposite her husband who uncovered the tureen with a delighted air, saying: "Oh! the good potpie! I know nothing better than that," she would think of the elegant dinners, of the shining silver, of the tapestries peopling the walls with ancient personages and rare birds in the midst of fairy forests; she thought of the exquisite food served on marvelous dishes, of the whispered gallantries, listened to with the smile of the Sphinx while eating the rose-colored flesh of the trout or a chicken's wing.

She had neither frocks nor jewels, nothing. And she loved only those things. She felt that she was made for them. She had such a desire to please, to be sought after, to be clever and courted.

She had a rich friend, a schoolmate at the convent, whom she did not like to visit; she suffered so much when she returned. And she

wept for whole days from chagrin, from regret, from despair and disappointment.

One evening her husband returned, elated, bearing in his hand a large envelope.

"Here," he said, "here is something for you."

She quickly tore open the wrapper and drew out a printed card on which were inscribed these words:

The Minister of Public Instruction and Madame George Ramponneau ask the honor of M. and Mme Loisel's company Monday evening, January 18, at the Minister's residence.

Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she threw the invitation spitefully upon the table, murmuring:

"What do you suppose I want with that?"

"But, my dearie, I thought it would make you happy. You never go out, and this is an occasion, and a fine one! I had a great deal of trouble to get it. Everybody wishes one, and it is very select; not many are given to employees. You will see the whole official world there."

She looked at him with an irritated eye and declared impatiently:

"What do you suppose I have to wear to such a thing as that?"

He had not thought of that; he stammered:

"Why, the dress you wear when we go to the theater. It seems very pretty to me."

He was silent, stupefied, in dismay, at the sight of his wife weeping. Two great tears fell slowly from the corners of her eyes toward the corners of her mouth; he stammered:

"What is the matter? What is the matter?"

By a violent effort she had controlled her vexation and responded in a calm voice, wiping her moist cheeks:

"Nothing. Only I have no dress and consequently I cannot go to this affair. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better fitted out than I."

He was grieved but answered:

"Let us see, Matilda. How much would a suitable costume cost, something that would serve for other occasions, something very simple?"

She reflected for some seconds, making estimates and thinking of a sum that she could ask for without bringing with it an immediate refusal and a frightened exclamation from the economical clerk.

Finally she said in a hesitating voice:

"I cannot tell exactly, but it seems to me that four hundred francs ought to cover it."

He turned a little pale, for he had saved just this sum to buy a gun that he might be able to join some hunting parties the next summer, on the plains at Nanterre, with some friends who went to shoot larks up there on Sunday. Nevertheless, he answered:

"Very well. I will give you four hundred francs. But try to have a pretty dress."

The day of the ball approached, and Mme Loisel seemed sad, disturbed, anxious. Nevertheless, her dress was nearly ready. Her husband said to her one evening:

"What is the matter with you? You have acted strangely for two or three days."

And she responded: "I am vexed not to have a jewel, not one stone, nothing to adorn myself with. I shall have such a poverty-laden look. I would prefer not to go to this party."

He replied: "You can wear some natural flowers. At this season they look very chic. For ten francs you can have two or three magnificent roses."

She was not convinced. "No," she replied, "there is nothing more humiliating than to have a shabby air in the midst of rich women."

Then her husband cried out: "How stupid we are! Go and find your friend Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you her jewels. You are well enough acquainted with her to do this."

She uttered a cry of joy. "It is true!" she said. "I had not thought of that."

The next day she took herself to her friend's house and related her story of distress. Mme Forestier went to her closet with the glass doors, took out a large jewel case, brought it, opened it and said: "Choose, my dear."

She saw at first some bracelets, then a collar of pearls, then a Venetian cross of gold and jewels and of admirable workmanship. She tried the jewels before the glass, hesitated, but could neither decide to take them nor leave them. Then she asked:

"Have you nothing more?"

"Why, yes. Look for yourself. I do not know what will please you."

Suddenly she discovered in a black satin box a superb necklace of diamonds, and her heart beat fast with an immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took them up. She placed them about her throat, against her dress, and remained in ecstasy before them. Then she asked in a hesitating voice full of anxiety:

"Could you lend me this? Only this?"

"Why, yes, certainly."

She fell upon the neck of her friend, embraced her with passion, then went away with her treasure.

The day of the ball arrived. Mme Loisel was a great success. She was the prettiest of all, elegant, gracious, smiling and full of joy. All the men noticed her, asked her name and wanted to be presented. All the members of the Cabinet wished to waltz with her. The minister of education paid her some attention.

She danced with enthusiasm, with passion, intoxicated with pleasure, thinking of nothing, in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a kind of cloud of happiness that came of all this homage and all this admiration, of all these awakened desires and this victory so complete and sweet to the heart of woman.

She went home toward four o'clock in the morning. Her husband had been half asleep in one of the little salons since midnight, with three other gentlemen whose wives were enjoying themselves very much.

He threw around her shoulders the wraps they had carried for the coming home, modest garments of everyday wear, whose poverty clashed with the elegance of the ball costume. She felt this and wished to hurry away in order not to be noticed by the other women who were wrapping themselves in rich furs.

Loisel detained her. "Wait," said he. "You will catch cold out there. I am going to call a cab."

But she would not listen and descended the steps rapidly. When they were in the street they found no carriage, and they began to seek for one, hailing the coachmen whom they saw at a distance.

They walked along toward the Seine, hopeless and shivering. Finally they found on the dock one of those old nocturnal coupés that one sees in Paris after nightfall, as if they were ashamed of their misery by day.

It took them as far as their door in Martyr Street, and they went wearily up to their apartment. It was all over for her. And on his part he remembered that he would have to be at the office by ten o'clock.

She removed the wraps from her shoulders before the glass for a final view of herself in her glory. Suddenly she uttered a cry. Her necklace was not around her neck.

Her husband, already half undressed, asked: "What is the matter?" She turned toward him excitedly:

"I have—I have—I no longer have Madame Forestier's necklace."

He arose in dismay: "What! How is that? It is not possible."

And they looked in the folds of the dress, in the folds of the mantle, in the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.

He asked: "You are sure you still had it when we left the house?"

"Yes, I felt it in the vestibule as we came out."

"But if you had lost it in the street we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes. It is probable. Did you take the number?"

"No. And you, did you notice what it was?"

"No."

They looked at each other, utterly cast down. Finally Loisel dressed himself again.

"I am going," said he, "over the track where we went on foot, to see if I can find it."

And he went. She remained in her evening gown, not having the force to go to bed, stretched upon a chair, without ambition or thoughts.

Toward seven o'clock her husband returned. He had found nothing.

He went to the police and to the cab offices and put an advertisement in the newspapers, offering a reward; he did everything that afforded them a suspicion of hope.

She waited all day in a state of bewilderment before this frightful disaster. Loisel returned at evening, with his face harrowed and pale, and had discovered nothing.

"It will be necessary," said he, "to write to your friend that you have broken the clasp of the necklace and that you will have it repaired. That will give us time to turn around."

She wrote as he dictated.

At the end of a week they had lost all hope. And Loisel, older by five years, declared:

"We must take measures to replace this jewel."

The next day they took the box which had inclosed it to the jeweler whose name was on the inside. He consulted his books.

"It is not I, madame," said he, "who sold this necklace; I only furnished the casket."

Then they went from jeweler to jeweler, seeking a necklace like the other one, consulting their memories, and ill, both of them, with chagrin and anxiety.

In a shop of the Palais-Royal they found a chaplet of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they had lost. It was valued at forty thousand francs. They could get it for thirty-six thousand.

They begged the jeweler not to sell it for three days. And they made an arrangement by which they might return it for thirty-four thousand francs if they found the other one before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs which his father had left him. He borrowed the rest.

He borrowed it, asking for a thousand francs of one, five hundred of another, five louis of this one and three louis of that one. He gave notes, made ruinous promises, took money of usurers and the whole race of lenders. He compromised his whole existence, in fact, risked his signature without even knowing whether he could make it good or not, and, harassed by anxiety for the future, by the black misery which surrounded him and by the prospect of all physical privations and moral torture, he went to get the new necklace, depositing on the merchant's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Mme Loisel took back the jewels to Mme Forestier the latter said to her in a frigid tone:

"You should have returned them to me sooner, for I might have needed them."

She did open the jewel box as her friend feared she would. If she should perceive the substitution what would she think? What should she say? Would she take her for a robber?

Mme Loisel now knew the horrible life of necessity. She did her part, however, completely, heroically. It was necessary to pay this frightful debt. She would pay it. They sent away the maid; they changed their lodgings; they rented some rooms under a mansard roof.

She learned the heavy cares of a household, the odious work of a kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her rosy nails upon the greasy pots and the bottoms of the stewpans. She washed the soiled linen, the chemises and dishcloths, which she hung on the line to dry; she took down the refuse to the street each morning and brought up the water, stopping at each landing to breathe. And, clothed like a woman of the people, she went to the grocer's, the butcher's and the fruiterer's with her basket on her arm, shopping, haggling to the last sou her miserable money.

Every month it was necessary to renew some notes, thus obtaining time, and to pay others.

The husband worked evenings, putting the books of some merchants in order, and nights he often did copying at five sous a page.

And this life lasted for ten years.

At the end of ten years they had restored all, all, with interest of the usurer, and accumulated interest, besides.

Mme Loisel seemed old now. She had become a strong, hard woman, the crude woman of the poor household. Her hair badly dressed, her skirts awry, her hands red, she spoke in a loud tone and washed the floors in large pails of water. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she would seat herself before the window and think of that evening party of former times, of that ball where she was so beautiful and so flattered.

How would it have been if she had not lost that necklace? Who knows? Who knows? How singular is life and how full of changes!
How small a thing will ruin or save one!

One Sunday, as she was taking a walk in the Champs Elysées to rid herself of the cares of the week, she suddenly perceived a woman walking with a child. It was Mme Forestier, still young, still pretty, still attractive. Mme Loisel was affected. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not?

She approached her. "Good morning, Jeanne."

Her friend did not recognize her and was astonished to be so familiarly addressed by this common personage. She stammered:

"But, madame—I do not know—— You must be mistaken."

"No, I am Matilda Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry of astonishment: "Oh! my poor Matilda! How you have changed."

"Yes, I have had some hard days since I saw you, and some miserable ones—and all because of you."

"Because of me? How is that?"

"You recall the diamond necklace that you loaned me to wear to the minister's ball?"

"Yes, very well."

"Well, I lost it."

"How is that, since you returned it to me?"

"I returned another to you exactly like it. And it has taken us ten years to pay for it. You can understand that it was not easy for us who have nothing. But it is finished, and I am decently content."

Mme Forestier stopped short. She said:

"You say that you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You did not perceive it then? They were just alike."

And she smiled with a proud and simple joy. Mme Forestier was touched and took both her hands as she replied:

"Oh, my poor Matilda! Mine were false. They were not worth over five hundred francs!"

IN THE MOONLIGHT

WELL MERITED was the name "soldier of God" by the Abbé Marignan. He was a tall, thin priest, fanatical to a degree, but just and of an exalted soul. All his beliefs were fixed, with never a waver. He thought that he understood God thoroughly, that he penetrated His designs, His wishes, His intentions.

Striding up and down the garden walk of his little country parsonage, sometimes a question arose in his mind: "Why did God make that?" Then in his thoughts, putting himself in God's place, he searched obstinately and nearly always was satisfied that he found the reason. He was not the man to murmur in transports of pious humility, "O Lord, thy ways are past finding out!" What he said was: "I am the servant of God; I ought to know the reason of what he does or to divine it if I do not."

Everything in nature seemed to him created with an absolute and admirable logic. The "wherefore" and the "because" were always balanced. The dawns were made to rejoice you on waking, the days to ripen the harvests, the rains to water them, the evenings to prepare for sleeping and the nights dark for sleep.

The four seasons corresponded perfectly to all the needs of agriculture, and to him the suspicion could never have come that nature has no intention and that all which lives has accustomed itself, on the contrary, to the hard conditions of different periods, of climates and of matter.

But he hated women; he hated them unconsciously and despised them by instinct. He often repeated the words of Christ, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" and he would add, "One would almost say that God himself was ill pleased with that particular work of his hands." Woman for him was indeed the "child twelve times unclean" of whom the poet speaks. She was the temptress who had ensnared the first man and who still continued her damnable work; she was the being who is feeble, dangerous, mysteriously troublous. And even more than her poisonous beauty he hated her loving soul.

He had often felt women's tenderness attack him, and though he knew himself to be unassailable he grew exasperated at this need of loving which quivers continually in their hearts.

To his mind God had only created woman to tempt man and to test him. Man should not approach her without those precautions for defense which he would take, and the fears he would cherish, near an

ambush. Woman, indeed, was just like a trap, with her arms extended and her lips open toward a man.

He had toleration only for nuns, rendered harmless by their vow; but he treated them harshly notwithstanding, because, ever at the bottom of their chained-up hearts, their chastened hearts, he perceived the eternal tenderness that constantly went out even to him although he was a priest.

He had a niece who lived with her mother in a little house near by. He was bent on making her a sister of charity. She was pretty and harebrained and a great tease. When the abbé sermonized she laughed; when he was angry at her she kissed him vehemently, pressing him to her heart while he would seek involuntarily to free himself from her embrace. Notwithstanding, it made him taste a certain sweet joy, awaking deep within him that sensation of fatherhood which slumbers in every man.

Often he talked to her of God, of his God, walking beside her along the footpaths through the fields. She hardly listened but looked at the sky, the grass, the flowers, with a joy of living which could be seen in her eyes. Sometimes she rushed forward to catch some flying creature and, bringing it back, would cry: "Look, my uncle, how pretty it is; I should like to kiss it." And this necessity to "kiss flies" or sweet flowers worried, irritated and revolted the priest who saw, even in that, the ineradicable tenderness which ever springs in the hearts of women.

One day the sacristan's wife, who kept house for the Abbé Margnan, told him very cautiously that his niece had a lover!

He experienced a dreadful emotion, and he stood choking, with the soap all over his face, in the act of shaving.

When he found himself able to think and speak once more he cried: "It is not true; you are lying, Melanie!"

But the peasant woman put her hand on her heart. "May our Lord judge me if I am lying, Monsieur le Curé. I tell you she goes to him every evening as soon as your sister is in bed. They meet each other beside the river. You have only to go there between ten o'clock and midnight and see for yourself."

He ceased scratching his chin and commenced to pace the room quickly, as he always did in his hours of gravest thought. When he tried to begin his shaving again he cut himself three times from nose to ear.

All day long he remained silent, swollen with anger and with rage. To his priestly zeal against the mighty power of love was added the moral indignation of a father, of a teacher, of a keeper of souls, who has been deceived, robbed, played with by a child. He felt the ego-

tistical sorrow that parents feel when their daughter announces that she has chosen a husband without them and in spite of their advice.

After his dinner he tried to read a little, but he could not attune himself to it and he grew angrier and angrier. When it struck ten he took his cane, a formidable oaken club which he always carried when he had to go out at night to visit the sick. Smilingly he regarded the enormous cudgel, holding it in his solid, countryman's fist and cutting threatening circles with it in the air. Then suddenly he raised it and, grinding his teeth, he brought it down upon a chair, the back of which, split in two, fell heavily to the ground.

He opened his door to go out, but he stopped upon the threshold, surprised by such a splendor of moonlight as you seldom see.

Endowed as he was with an exalted spirit, such a spirit as must have belonged to those dreamer-poets, the Fathers of the Church, he felt himself suddenly softened and moved by the grand and serene beauty of the pale-faced night.

In his little garden, bathed in the soft brilliance, his fruit trees, all arow, were outlining in shadow upon the walk their slender limbs of wood scarce clothed with green; while the giant honeysuckle climbing on the house wall exhaled delicious sugared breaths which hovered through the warm clear night like a perfumed soul.

He began to breathe deep, drinking the air as drunkards drink their wine and walking slowly, ravished, surprised and almost oblivious of his niece.

As he stepped into the open country he stopped to contemplate the whole plain, inundated by this caressing radiance and drowned in the tender and languishing charm of the serene night. In chorus the frogs threw into space their short metallic notes, and with the seduction of the moonlight distant nightingales mingled that fitful music of theirs which brings no thoughts but dreams, a light and vibrant melody which seems attuned to kisses.

The abbé continued his walk, his courage failing, he knew not why. He felt, as it were, enfeebled and suddenly exhausted; he had a great desire to sit down, to pause right there and praise God in all His works.

Below him, following the bends of the little river, wound a great line of poplars. On and about the banks, wrapping all the tortuous watercourse in a kind of light, transparent wadding, hung suspended a fine mist, a white vapor, which the moon rays crossed and silvered and caused to gleam.

The priest paused yet again, penetrated to the depths of his soul by a strong and growing emotion. And a doubt, a vague uneasiness, seized

on him; he felt that one of those questions he sometimes put to himself was now being born.

Why had God done this? Since the night is destined for sleep, for unconsciousness, for repose, for forgetfulness of everything, why, then, make it more charming than the day, sweeter than dawns and sunsets? And this slow, seductive star, more poetical than the sun and so discreet that it seems designed to light up things too delicate, too mysterious for the great luminary—why had it come to brighten all the shades? Why did not the sweetest of all songsters go to rest like the others? Why set himself to singing in the vaguely troubling dark? Why this half veil over the world? Why these quiverings of the heart, this emotion of the soul, this languor of the body? Why this display of seductions which mankind never sees, since night brings sleep? For whom was this sublime spectacle intended, this flood of poetry poured from heaven to earth? The abbé did not understand it at all.

But then, down there along the edge of the pasture, appeared two shadows walking side by side under the arched roof of the trees all soaked in glittering mist.

The man was the taller and had his arm about his mistress's neck; from time to time he kissed her on the forehead. They animated the lifeless landscape which enveloped them, a divine frame made, as it were, expressly for them. They seemed, these two, a single being, the being for whom this calm and silent night was destined; and they approached the priest like a living answer, the answer vouchsafed by his Master to his question.

He stood stock-still, overwhelmed and with a beating heart. He likened it to some Bible story such as the loves of Ruth and Boaz, the accomplishment of the will of the Lord in one of those great scenes talked of in Holy Writ. Through his head ran the verses of the *Song of Songs*, the ardent cries, the calls of the body, all the passionate poetry of that poem which burns with tenderness and love. And he said to himself, "God perhaps has made such nights as this to clothe with his ideals the loves of men."

He withdrew before the couple, who went on arm in arm. It was really his niece, and now he asked himself if he had not been about to disobey God. For does not God indeed permit love, since He surrounds it visibly with splendor such as this?

And he fled in amaze, almost ashamed, as if he had penetrated into a temple where he had no right to enter.

LOVE

THREE PAGES FROM A SPORTSMAN'S BOOK

I HAVE JUST READ among the general news in one of the papers a drama of passion. He killed her and then he killed himself, so he must have loved her. What matters He or She? Their love alone matters to me, and it does not interest me because it moves me or astonishes me or because it softens me or makes me think, but because it recalls to my mind a remembrance of my youth, a strange recollection of a hunting adventure where Love appeared to me, as the Cross appeared to the early Christians, in the midst of the heavens.

I was born with all the instincts and the senses of primitive man, tempered by the arguments and the restraints of a civilized being. I am passionately fond of shooting, yet the sight of the wounded animal, of the blood on its feathers and on my hands, affects my heart so as almost to make it stop.

That year the cold weather set in suddenly toward the end of autumn, and I was invited by one of my cousins, Karl de Rauville, to go with him and shoot ducks on the marshes at daybreak.

My cousin was a jolly fellow of forty with red hair, very stout and bearded, a country gentleman, an amiable semibrute of a happy disposition and endowed with that Gallic wit which makes even mediocrity agreeable. He lived in a house, half farmhouse, half château, situated in a broad valley through which a river ran. The hills right and left were covered with woods, old manorial woods where magnificent trees still remained and where the rarest feathered game in that part of France was to be found. Eagles were shot there occasionally, and birds of passage, such as rarely venture into our overpopulated part of the country, invariably lighted amid these giant oaks as if they knew or recognized some little corner of a primeval forest which had remained there to serve them as a shelter during their short nocturnal halt.

In the valley there were large meadows watered by trenches and separated by hedges; then, further on, the river, which up to that point had been kept between banks, expanded into a vast marsh. That marsh was the best shooting ground I ever saw. It was my cousin's chief care, and he kept it as a preserve. Through the rushes that covered it, and made it rustling and rough, narrow passages had been cut, through which the flat-bottomed boats, impelled and steered by poles, passed along silently over dead water, brushing up against

the reeds and making the swift fish take refuge in the weeds and the wild fowl, with their pointed black heads, dive suddenly.

I am passionately fond of the water: of the sea, though it is too vast, too full of movement, impossible to hold; of the rivers which are so beautiful but which pass on and flee away; and above all of the marshes, where the whole unknown existence of aquatic animals palpitates. The marsh is an entire world in itself on the world of earth—a different world which has its own life, its settled inhabitants and its passing travelers, its voices, its noises and above all its mystery. Nothing is more impressive, nothing more disquieting, more terrifying occasionally, than a fen. Why should a vague terror hang over these low plains covered with water? Is it the low rustling of the rushes, the strange will-o'-the-wisp lights, the silence which prevails on calm nights, the still mists which hang over the surface like a shroud; or is it the almost inaudible splashing, so slight and so gentle, yet sometimes more terrifying than the cannons of men or the thunders of the skies, which make these marshes resemble countries one has dreamed of, terrible countries holding an unknown and dangerous secret?

No, something else belongs to it—another mystery, perhaps the mystery of the creation itself! For was it not in stagnant and muddy water, amid the heavy humidity of moist land under the heat of the sun, that the first germ of life pulsated and expanded to the day?

I arrived at my cousin's in the evening. It was freezing hard enough to split the stones.

During dinner, in the large room whose sideboards, walls and ceiling were covered with stuffed birds with wings extended or perched on branches to which they were nailed—hawks, herons, owls, nightjars, buzzards, tercelts, vultures, falcons—my cousin, who, dressed in a sealskin jacket, himself resembled some strange animal from a cold country, told me what preparations he had made for that same night.

We were to start at half-past three in the morning so as to arrive at the place which he had chosen for our watching place at about half-past four. On that spot a hut had been built of lumps of ice so as to shelter us somewhat from the trying wind which precedes day-break, a wind so cold as to tear the flesh like a saw, cut it like the blade of a knife, prick it like a poisoned sting, twist it like a pair of pincers and burn it like fire.

My cousin rubbed his hands. "I have never known such a frost," he said; "it is already twelve degrees below zero at six o'clock in the evening."

I threw myself onto my bed immediately after we had finished our

meal and went to sleep by the light of a bright fire burning in the grate.

At three o'clock he woke me. In my turn I put on a sheepskin and found my cousin Karl covered with a bearskin. After having each swallowed two cups of scalding coffee, followed by glasses of liqueur brandy, we started, accompanied by a gamekeeper and our dogs, Plongeon and Pierrot.

From the first moment that I got outside I felt chilled to the very marrow. It was one of those nights on which the earth seems dead with cold. The frozen air becomes resisting and palpable, such pain does it cause; no breath of wind moves it, it is fixed and motionless! it bites you, pierces through you, dries you, kills the trees, the plants, the insects, the small birds themselves, who fall from the branches onto the hard ground and become stiff themselves under the grip of the cold.

The moon, which was in her last quarter and was inclining all to one side, seemed fainting in the midst of space, so weak that she was unable to wane, forced to stay up yonder, seized and paralyzed by the severity of the weather. She shed a cold mournful light over the world, that dying and wan light which she gives us every month at the end of her period.

Karl and I walked side by side, our backs bent, our hands in our pockets and our guns under our arms. Our boots, which were wrapped in wool so that we might be able to walk without slipping on the frozen river, made no sound, and I looked at the white vapor which our dogs' breath made.

We were soon on the edge of the marsh and entered one of the lanes of dry rushes which ran through the low forest.

Our elbows, which touched the long ribbonlike leaves, left a slight noise behind us, and I was seized, as I had never been before, by the powerful and singular emotion which marshes cause in me. This one was dead, dead from cold, since we were walking on it in the middle of its population of dried rushes.

Suddenly, at the turn of one of the lanes, I perceived the ice hut which had been constructed to shelter us. I went in, and as we had nearly an hour to wait before the wandering birds would awake I rolled myself up in my rug in order to try and get warm. Then, lying on my back, I began to look at the misshapen moon, which had four horns through the vaguely transparent walls of this polar house. But the frost of the frozen marshes, the cold of these walls, the cold from the firmament penetrated me so terribly that I began to cough. My cousin Karl became uneasy.

"No matter if we do not kill much today," he said. "I do not want

you to catch cold; we will light a fire." And he told the gamekeeper to cut some rushes.

We made a pile in the middle of our hut, which had a hole in the middle of the roof to let out the smoke, and when the red flames rose up to the clear crystal blocks they began to melt, gently, imperceptibly, as if they were sweating. Karl, who had remained outside, called out to me: "Come and look here!" I went out of the hut and remained struck with astonishment. Our hut, in the shape of a cone, looked like an enormous diamond with a heart of fire which had been suddenly planted there in the midst of the frozen water of the marsh. And inside we saw two fantastic forms, those of our dogs, who were warming themselves at the fire.

But a peculiar cry, a lost, a wandering cry, passed over our heads, and the light from our hearth showed us the wild birds. Nothing moves one so much as the first clamor of a life which one does not see, which passes through the somber air so quickly and so far off, just before the first streak of a winter's day appears on the horizon. It seems to me, at this glacial hour of dawn, as if that passing cry which is carried away by the wings of a bird is the sigh of a soul from the world!

"Put out the fire," said Karl; "it is getting daylight."

The sky was, in fact, beginning to grow pale, and the flights of ducks made long rapid streaks which were soon obliterated on the sky.

A stream of light burst out into the night; Karl had fired, and the two dogs ran forward.

And then nearly every minute now he, now I, aimed rapidly as soon as the shadow of a flying flock appeared above the rushes. And Pierrot and Plongeon, out of breath but happy, retrieved the bleeding birds whose eyes still, occasionally, looked at us.

The sun had risen, and it was a bright day with a blue sky, and we were thinking of taking our departure, when two birds with extended necks and outstretched wings glided rapidly over our heads. I fired, and one of them fell almost at my feet. It was a teal with a silver breast, and then, in the blue space above me, I heard a voice, the voice of a bird. It was a short, repeated, heart-rending lament; and the bird, the little animal that had been spared, began to turn round in the blue sky over our heads, looking at its dead companion which I was holding in my hand.

Karl was on his knees, his gun to his shoulder, watching it eagerly until it should be within shot. "You have killed the duck," he said, "and the drake will not fly away."

He certainly did not fly away; he circled over our heads continually and continued his cries. Never have any groans of suffering pained me

so much as that desolate appeal, as that lamentable reproach of this poor bird which was lost in space.

Occasionally he took flight under the menace of the gun which followed his movements and seemed ready to continue his flight alone, but as he could not make up his mind to this he returned to find his mate.

"Leave her on the ground," Karl said to me; "he will come within shot by and by." And he did indeed come near us, careless of danger, infatuated by his animal love, by his affection for his mate which I had just killed.

Karl fired, and it was as if somebody had cut the string which held the bird suspended. I saw something black descend, and I heard the noise of a fall among the rushes. And Pierrot brought it to me.

I put them—they were already cold—into the same gamebag, and I returned to Paris the same evening.

MADEMOISELLE FIFI

THE Major Graf¹ von Farlsberg, the Prussian commandant, was reading his newspaper, lying back in a great armchair, with his booted feet on the beautiful marble fireplace, where his spurs had made two holes which grew deeper every day during the three months that he had been in the château of Urville.

A cup of coffee was smoking on a small inlaid table which was stained with liquors, burnt by cigars, notched by the penknife of the victorious officer who occasionally would stop while sharpening a pencil to jot down figures or to make a drawing on it, just as it took his fancy.

When he had read his letters and the German newspapers which his baggagemaster had brought him he got up, and after throwing three or four enormous pieces of green wood onto the fire—for these gentlemen were gradually cutting down the park in order to keep themselves warm—he went to the window. The rain was descending in torrents, a regular Normandy rain, which looked as if it were being poured out by some furious hand, a slanting rain, which was as thick as a curtain and which formed a kind of wall with oblique stripes and which deluged everything, a regular rain, such as one frequently experiences in the neighborhood of Rouen, which is the watering pot of France.

¹ Count.

For a long time the officer looked at the sodden turf and at the swollen Andelle beyond it, which was overflowing its banks, and he was drumming a waltz from the Rhine on the windowpanes with his fingers, when a noise made him turn round; it was his second in command, Captain Baron von Kelweinstein.

The major was a giant with broad shoulders and a long, fair beard, which hung like a cloth onto his chest. His whole solemn person suggested the idea of a military peacock, a peacock who was carrying his tail spread out onto his breast. He had cold, gentle blue eyes and the scar from a sword cut which he had received in the war with Austria; he was said to be an honorable man as well as a brave officer.

The captain, a short, red-faced man who was tightly girthed in at the waist, had his red hair cropped quite close to his head and in certain lights almost looked as if he had been rubbed over with phosphorous. He had lost two front teeth one night, though he could not quite remember how. This defect made him speak so that he could not always be understood, and he had a bald patch on the top of his head, which made him look rather like a monk with a fringe of curly, bright golden hair round the circle of bare skin.

The commandant shook hands with him and drank his cup of coffee (the sixth that morning) at a draught, while he listened to his subordinate's report of what had occurred; and then they both went to the window and declared that it was a very unpleasant outlook. The major, who was a quiet man with a wife at home, could accommodate himself to everything, but the captain, who was rather fast, being in the habit of frequenting low resorts and much given to women, was mad at having been shut up for three months in the compulsory chastity of that wretched hole.

There was a knock at the door, and when the commandant said, "Come in," one of their automatic soldiers appeared and by his mere presence announced that breakfast was ready. In the dining room they met three other officers of lower rank: a lieutenant, Otto von Grossling, and two sublieutenants, Fritz Scheuneberg and Count von Eyrick, a very short, fair-haired man, who was proud and brutal toward men, harsh toward prisoners and very violent.

Since he had been in France his comrades had called him nothing but "Mademoiselle Fifi." They had given him that nickname on account of his dandified style and small waist, which looked as if he wore stays, from his pale face, on which his budding mustache scarcely showed, and on account of the habit he had acquired of employing the French expression, *fi, fi donc*, which he pronounced with a slight whistle when he wished to express his sovereign contempt for persons or things.

The dining room of the château was a magnificent long room whose fine old mirrors, now cracked by pistol bullets, and Flemish tapestry, now cut to ribbons and hanging in rags in places from sword cuts, told too well what Mademoiselle Fifi's occupation was during his spare time.

There were three family portraits on the walls: a steel-clad knight, a cardinal and a judge, who were all smoking long porcelain pipes which had been inserted into holes in the canvas, while a lady in a long pointed waist proudly exhibited an enormous pair of mustaches drawn with a piece of charcoal.

The officers ate their breakfast almost in silence in that mutilated room which looked dull in the rain and melancholy under its vanquished appearance, although its old oak floor had become as solid as the stone floor of a public house.

When they had finished eating and were smoking and drinking, they began, as usual, to talk about the dull life they were leading. The bottle of brandy and of liquors passed from hand to hand, and all sat back in their chairs, taking repeated sips from their glasses and scarcely removing the long bent stems, which terminated in china bowls painted in a manner to delight a Hottentot, from their mouths.

As soon as their glasses were empty they filled them again with a gesture of resigned weariness, but Mademoiselle Fifi emptied his every minute, and a soldier immediately gave him another. They were enveloped in a cloud of strong tobacco smoke; they seemed to be sunk in a state of drowsy, stupid intoxication, in that dull state of drunkenness of men who have nothing to do, when suddenly the baron sat up and said: "By heavens! This cannot go on; we must think of something to do." And on hearing this, Lieutenant Otto and Sublieutenant Fritz, who pre-eminently possessed the grave, heavy German countenance, said: "What, Captain?"

He thought for a few moments and then replied: "What? Well, we must get up some entertainment if the commandant will allow us."

"What sort of an entertainment, Captain?" the major asked, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

"I will arrange all that, Commandant," the baron said. "I will send *Le Devoir* to Rouen, who will bring us some ladies. I know where they can be found. We will have supper here, as all the materials are at hand, and at least we shall have a jolly evening."

Graf von Farlsberg shrugged his shoulders with a smile: "You must surely be mad, my friend."

But all the other officers got up, surrounded their chief and said: "Let Captain have his own way, Commandant; it is terribly dull here."

And the major ended by yielding. "Very well," he replied, and the baron immediately sent for *Le Devoir*.

The latter was an old corporal who had never been seen to smile, but who carried out all orders of his superiors to the letter, no matter what they might be. He stood there with an impassive face while he received the baron's instructions and then went out; five minutes later a large wagon belonging to the military train, covered with a miller's tilt, galloped off as fast as four horses could take it under the pouring rain, and the officers all seemed to awaken from their lethargy; their looks brightened, and they began to talk.

Although it was raining as hard as ever, the major declared that it was not so dull, and Lieutenant von Grossling said with conviction that the sky was clearing up, while Mademoiselle Fifi did not seem to be able to keep in his place. He got up and sat down again, and his bright eyes seemed to be looking for something to destroy. Suddenly, looking at the lady with the mustaches, the young fellow pulled out his revolver and said: "You shall not see it." And without leaving his seat he aimed and with two successive bullets cut out both the eyes of the portrait.

"Let us make a mine!" he then exclaimed, and the conversation was suddenly interrupted, as if they had found some fresh and powerful subject of interest. The mine was his invention, his method of destruction and his favorite amusement.

When he left the château the lawful owner, Count Fernand d'Amoys d'Urville, had not had time to carry away or to hide anything except the plate, which had been stowed away in a hole made in one of the walls so that, as he was very rich and had good taste, the large drawing room, which opened into the dining room, had looked like the gallery in a museum before his precipitate flight.

Expensive oil paintings, water colors and drawings hung upon the walls, while on the tables, on the hanging shelves and in elegant glass cupboards there were a thousand knickknacks: small vases, statuettes, groups in Dresden china, grotesque Chinese figures, old ivory and Venetian glass, which filled the large room with their precious and fantastical array.

Scarcely anything was left now; not that the things had been stolen, for the major would not have allowed that, but Mademoiselle Fifi *would have a mine*, and on that occasion all the officers thoroughly enjoyed themselves for five minutes. The little marquis went into the drawing room to get what he wanted, and he brought back a small, delicate china teapot, which he filled with gunpowder, and carefully introduced a piece of German tinder into it, through the spout. Then

he lighted it and took this infernal machine into the next room, but he came back immediately and shut the door. The Germans all stood expectantly, their faces full of childish, smiling curiosity, and as soon as the explosion had shaken the château they all rushed in at once.

Mademoiselle Fifi, who got in first, clapped his hands in delight at the sight of a terra-cotta Venus, whose head had been blown off, and each picked up pieces of porcelain and wondered at the strange shape of the fragments, while the major was looking with a paternal eye at the large drawing room which had been wrecked in such a Neronic fashion and which was strewn with the fragments of works of art. He went out first and said, with a smile: "He managed that very well!"

But there was such a cloud of smoke in the dining room mingled with the tobacco smoke that they could not breathe, so the commandant opened the window, and all the officers, who had gone into the room for a glass of cognac, went up to it.

The moist air blew into the room and brought a sort of spray with it which powdered their beards. They looked at the tall trees which were dripping with the rain, at the broad valley which was covered with mist and at the church spire in the distance which rose up like a gray point in the beating rain.

The bells had not rung since their arrival. That was the only resistance which the invaders had met with in the neighborhood. The parish priest had not refused to take in and to feed the Prussian soldiers; he had several times even drunk a bottle of beer or claret with the hostile commandant, who often employed him as a benevolent intermediary, but it was no use to ask him for a single stroke of the bells; he would sooner have allowed himself to be shot. That was his way of protesting against the invasion, a peaceful and silent protest, the only one, he said, which was suitable to a priest who was a man of mildness and not of blood; and everyone for twenty-five miles round praised Abbé Chantavoine's firmness and heroism in venturing to proclaim the public mourning by the obstinate silence of his church bells.

The whole village grew enthusiastic over his resistance and was ready to back up their pastor and to risk anything, as they looked upon that silent protest as the safeguard of the national honor. It seemed to the peasants that thus they had deserved better of their country than Belfort and Strassburg, that they had set an equally valuable example and that the name of their little village would become immortalized by that, but with that exception, they refused their Prussian conquerors nothing.

The commandant and his officers laughed among themselves at that inoffensive courage, and as the people in the whole country round

showed themselves obliging and compliant toward them, they willingly tolerated their silent patriotism. Only little Count Wilhelm would have liked to have forced them to ring the bells. He was very angry at his superior's politic compliance with the priest's scruples, and every day he begged the commandant to allow him to sound "dingdong, dingdong" just once, only just once, just by way of a joke. And he asked it like a wheedling woman, in the tender voice of some mistress who wishes to obtain something, but the commandant would not yield, and to console *herself* Mademoiselle Fifi made a *mine* in the château.

The five men stood there together for some minutes, inhaling the moist air, and at last Sublieutenant Fritz said with a laugh: "The ladies will certainly not have fine weather for their drive." Then they separated, each to his own duties, while the captain had plenty to do in seeing about the dinner.

When they met again as it was growing dark, they began to laugh at seeing each other as dandified and smart as on the day of a grand review. The commandant's hair did not look as gray as it did in the morning, and the captain had shaved—had only kept his mustache on, which made him look as if he had a streak of fire under his nose.

In spite of the rain they left the window open, and one of them went to listen from time to time. At a quarter past six the baron said he heard a rumbling in the distance. They all rushed down, and soon the wagon drove up at a gallop with its four horses, splashed up to their backs, steaming and panting. Five women got out at the bottom of the steps, five handsome girls whom a comrade of the captain, to whom *Le Devoir* had taken his card, had selected with care.

They had not required much pressing, as they were sure of being well treated, for they had got to know the Prussians in the three months during which they had had to do with them. So they resigned themselves to the men as they did to the state of affairs. "It is part of our business, so it must be done," they said as they drove along, no doubt to allay some slight, secret scruples of conscience.

They went into the dining room immediately, which looked still more dismal in its dilapidated state when it was lighted up, while the table, covered with choice dishes, the beautiful china and glass and the plate, which had been found in the hole in the wall, where its owner had hidden it, gave to the place the look of a bandits' resort, where they were supping after committing a robbery. The captain was radiant; he took hold of the women as if he were familiar with them, appraising them, kissing them, valuing them for what they were worth as *ladies of pleasure*, and when the three young men wanted to appropriate one each he opposed them authoritatively, reserving to

himself the right to apportion them justly, according to their several ranks, so as not to wound the hierarchy. Therefore, so as to avoid all discussion, jarring and suspicion of partiality, he placed them all in a line according to height and addressing the tallest, he said in a voice of command:

"What is your name?"

"Pamela," she replied, raising her voice.

Then he said: "Number one, called Pamela, is adjudged to the commandant."

Then, having kissed Blondina, the second, as a sign of proprietorship, he proffered stout Amanda to Lieutenant Otto, Eva, "the Tomato," to Sublieutenant Fritz, and Rachel, the shortest of them all, a very young, dark girl, with eyes as black as ink, a Jewess, whose snub nose confirmed by exception the rule which allots hooked noses to all her race, to the youngest officer, frail Count Wilhelm von Eyrick.

They were all pretty and plump, without any distinctive features, and all were very much alike in look and person from their daily dissipation and the life common to houses of public accommodation.

The three younger men wished to carry off their women immediately, under the pretext of finding them brushes and soap, but the captain wisely opposed this, for he said they were quite fit to sit down to dinner and that those who went up would wish for a change when they came down, and so would disturb the other couples, and his experience in such matters carried the day. There were only many kisses, expectant kisses.

Suddenly Rachel choked and began to cough until the tears came into her eyes, while smoke came through her nostrils. Under pretense of kissing her the count had blown a whiff of tobacco into her mouth. She did not fly into a rage and did not say a word, but she looked at her possessor with latent hatred in her dark eyes.

They sat down to dinner. The commandant seemed delighted; he made Pamela sit on his right and Blondina on his left and said as he unfolded his table napkin: "That was a delightful idea of yours, Captain."

Lieutenants Otto and Fritz, who were as polite as if they had been with fashionable ladies, rather intimidated their neighbors, but Baron von Kelweinstein gave the reins to all his vicious propensities, beamed, made doubtful remarks and seemed on fire with his crown of red hair. He paid them compliments in French from the other side of the Rhine and sputtered out gallant remarks, only fit for a low pothouse, from between his two broken teeth.

They did not understand him, however, and their intelligence did

not seem to be awakened until he uttered nasty words and broad expressions which were mangled by his accent. Then all began to laugh at once, like mad women, and fell against each other, repeating the words which the baron then began to say all wrong, in order that he might have the pleasure of hearing them say doubtful things. They gave him as much of that stuff as he wanted, for they were drunk after the first bottle of wine and, becoming themselves once more and opening the door to their usual habits, they kissed the mustaches on the right and left of them, pinched their arms, uttered furious cries, drank out of every glass and sang French couplets and bits of German songs which they had picked up in their daily intercourse with the enemy.

Soon the men themselves, intoxicated by that which was displayed to their sight and touch, grew very amorous, shouted and broke the plates and dishes, while the soldiers behind them waited on them stolidly. The commandant was the only one who put any restraint upon himself.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel onto his knees and, getting excited, at one moment kissed the little black curls on her neck, inhaling the pleasant warmth of her body and all the savor of her person through the slight space there was between her dress and her skin, and at another pinched her furiously through the material and made her scream, for he was seized with a species of ferocity and tormented by his desire to hurt her. He often held her close to him, as if to make her part of himself, and put his lips in a long kiss on the Jewess's rosy mouth until she lost her breath, and at last he bit her until a stream of blood ran down her chin and onto her bodice.

For the second time she looked him full in the face, and as she bathed the wound she said: "You will have to pay for that!"

But he merely laughed a hard laugh and said: "I will pay."

At dessert champagne was served, and the commandant rose, and in the same voice in which he would have drunk to the health of the Empress Augusta he drank: "To our ladies!" Then a series of toasts began, toasts worthy of the lowest soldiers and of drunkards, mingled with filthy jokes which were made still more brutal by their ignorance of the language. They got up, one after the other, trying to say something witty, forcing themselves to be funny, and the women, who were so drunk that they almost fell off their chairs, with vacant looks and clammy tongues applauded madly each time.

The captain, who no doubt wished to impart an appearance of gallantry to the orgy, raised his glass again and said: "To our victories over hearts!" Thereupon Lieutenant Otto, who was a species of bear from the Black Forest, jumped up, inflamed and saturated with drink

and seized by an access of alcoholic patriotism, cried: "To our victories over France!"

Drunk as they were, the women were silent, and Rachel turned round with a shudder and said: "Look here, I know some Frenchmen in whose presence you would not dare to say that." But the little count, still holding her on his knees, began to laugh, for the wine had made him very merry, and said: "Ha! ha! ha! I have never met any of them myself. As soon as we show ourselves they run away!"

The girl, who was in a terrible rage, shouted into his face: "You are lying, you dirty scoundrel!"

For a moment he looked at her steadily, with his bright eyes upon her, as he had looked at the portrait before he destroyed it with revolver bullets, and then he began to laugh: "Ah yes, talk about them, my dear! Should we be here now if they were brave?" Then, getting excited, he exclaimed: "We are the masters! France belongs to us!" She jumped off his knees with a bound and threw herself into her chair, while he rose, held out his glass over the table and repeated: "France and the French, the woods, the fields and the houses of France belong to us!"

The others, who were quite drunk and who were suddenly seized by military enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of brutes, seized their glasses and, shouting, "Long live Prussia!" emptied them at a draught.

The girls did not protest, for they were reduced to silence and were afraid. Even Rachel did not say a word, as she had no reply to make, and then the little count put his champagne glass, which had just been refilled, onto the head of the Jewess and exclaimed: "All the women in France belong to us also!"

At that she got up so quickly that the glass upset, spilling the amber-colored wine onto her black hair, as if to baptize her, and broke into a hundred fragments as it fell onto the floor. With trembling lips she defied the looks of the officer, who was still laughing, and she stammered out in a voice choked with rage: "That—that—that—is not true—for you shall certainly not have any French women."

He sat down again, so as to laugh at his ease and, trying effectually to speak in the Parisian accent, he said: "That is good, very good! Then what did you come here for, my dear?"

She was thunderstruck and made no reply for a moment, for in her agitation she did not understand him at first, but as soon as she grasped his meaning she said to him indignantly and vehemently: "I! I am not a woman; I am only a strumpet, and that is all that Prussians want."

Almost before she had finished he slapped her full in her face, but as he was raising his hand again, as if he would strike her, she, almost

mad with passion, took up a small dessert knife from the table and stabbed him right in the neck, just above the breastbone. Something that he was going to say was cut short in his throat, and he sat there with his mouth half open and a terrible look in his eyes.

All the officers shouted in horror and leaped up tumultuously, but, throwing her chair between Lieutenant Otto's legs, who fell down at full length, she ran to the window, opened it before they could seize her and jumped out into the night and pouring rain.

In two minutes Mademoiselle Fifi was dead. Fritz and Otto drew their swords and wanted to kill the women, who threw themselves at their feet and clung to their knees. With some difficulty the major stopped the slaughter and had the four terrified girls locked up in a room under the care of two soldiers. Then he organized the pursuit of the fugitive as carefully as if he were about to engage in a skirmish, feeling quite sure that she would be caught.

The table, which had been cleared immediately, now served as a bed on which to lay Fifi out, and the four officers made for the window, rigid and sobered, with the stern faces of soldiers on duty, and tried to pierce through the darkness of the night, amid the steady torrent of rain. Suddenly a shot was heard and then another a long way off, and for four hours they heard from time to time near or distant reports and rallying cries, strange words uttered as a call in guttural voices.

In the morning they all returned. Two soldiers had been killed and three others wounded by their comrades in the ardor of that chase and in the confusion of such a nocturnal pursuit, but they had not caught Rachel.

Then the inhabitants of the district were terrorized; the houses were turned topsy-turvy; the country was scoured and beaten up over and over again, but the Jewess did not seem to have left a single trace of her passage behind her.

When the general was told of it he gave orders to hush up the affair so as not to set a bad example to the army, but he severely censured the commandant, who in turn punished his inferiors. The general had said: "One does not go to war in order to amuse oneself and to caress prostitutes." And Graf von Farlsberg, in his exasperation, made up his mind to have his revenge on the district, but as he required a pretext for showing severity, he sent for the priest and ordered him to have the bell tolled at the funeral of Count von Eyrick.

Contrary to all expectation, the priest showed himself humble and most respectful, and when Mademoiselle Fifi's body left the Château d'Urville on its way to the cemetery, carried by soldiers, preceded, surrounded and followed by soldiers, who marched with loaded rifles,

for the first time the bell sounded its funereal knell in a lively manner, as if a friendly hand were caressing it. At night it sounded again, and the next day and every day; it rang as much as anyone could desire. Sometimes even it would start at night and sound gently through the darkness, seized by strange joy, awakened; one could not tell why. All the peasants in the neighborhood declared that it was bewitched, and nobody except the priest and the sacristan would now go near the church tower, and they went because a poor girl was living there in grief and solitude, secretly nourished by those two men.

She remained there until the German troops departed, and then one evening the priest borrowed the baker's cart and himself drove his prisoner to Rouen. When they got there he embraced her, and she quickly went back on foot to the establishment from which she had come, where the proprietress, who thought that she was dead, was very glad to see her.

A short time afterward a patriot who had no prejudices, who liked her because of her bold deed and who afterward loved her for herself, married her and made a lady of her.

BABETTE

I WAS NOT very fond of inspecting that asylum for old, infirm people officially, as I was obliged to go over it in company of the superintendent, who was talkative and a statistician. But then the grandson of the foundress accompanied us and was evidently pleased at that minute inspection. He was a charming man and the owner of a large forest, where he had given me permission to shoot, and I was of course obliged to pretend to be interested in his grandmother's philanthropic work. So with a smile on my lips I endured the superintendent's interminable discourse, punctuating it here and there as best as I could by:

"Ah! Really! Very strange indeed! I should never have believed it!"

I was absolutely ignorant of the remark to which I replied thus, for my thoughts were lulled to repose by the constant humming of our loquacious guide. I was vaguely conscious that the persons and things might have appeared worthy of attention to me if I had been there alone as an idler, for in that case I should certainly have asked the superintendent: "What is this Babette whose name appears so constantly in the complaints of so many of the inmates?"

Quite a dozen men and women had spoken to us about her, now

to complain of her, now to praise her, and especially the women, as soon as they saw the superintendent, cried out:

"M'sieur, Babette has again been——"

"There! That will do; that will do!" he interrupted them, his gentle voice suddenly becoming harsh. At other times he would amicably question some old man with a happy countenance and say:

"Well, my friend! I suppose you are very happy here?"

Many replied with fervent expressions of gratitude with which Babette's name was frequently mingled. When he heard them speak so the superintendent put on an ecstatic air, looked up to heaven with clasped hands and said, slowly shaking his head: "Ah! Babette is a very precious woman, very precious!"

Yes, it would certainly interest one to know who that creature was, but not under present circumstances, and so, rather than to undergo any more of this, I made up my mind to remain in ignorance of who Babette was, for I could pretty well guess what she would be like. I pictured her to myself as a flower that had sprung up in a corner of these dull courtyards like a ray of sun shining through the sepulchral gloom of these dismal passages.

I pictured her so clearly to myself that I did not even feel any wish to know her. Yet she was dear to me because of the happy expression which they all put on when they spoke of her, and I was angry with the old women who spoke against her. One thing, certainly, puzzled me, and that was that the superintendent was among those who went into ecstasies over her, and this made me strongly disinclined to question him about her, though I had no other reason for the feeling.

But all this passed through my mind in rather a confused manner, without my taking the trouble to fix or to formulate any ideas or explanations. I continued to dream rather than to think effectively, and it is very probable that when my visit was over I should not have remembered much about it, not even with regard to Babette, if I had not been suddenly awakened by the sight of her in the flesh and been quite upset by the difference that there was between my fancy and the reality.

We had just crossed a small back yard and had gone into a very dark passage, when a door suddenly opened at the other end of it and an unexpected apparition appeared. We could indistinctly see that it was the figure of a woman. At the same moment the superintendent called out in a furious voice:

"Babette! Babette!"

He had mechanically quickened his pace and almost ran. We followed him, and he quickly opened the door through which the apparition had vanished. It led onto a staircase, and he again called out,

but a burst of stifled laughter was the only reply. I looked over the balustrade and saw a woman down below who was looking at us fixedly.

She was an old woman—there could be no doubt of that from her wrinkled face and the few straggling gray locks which appeared under her cap. But one did not think of that when one saw her eyes, which were wonderfully youthful; in fact, one saw nothing but them. They were profound eyes, of a deep, almost violet blue, the eyes of a child.

Suddenly the superintendent called out to her: "You have been with *La Frieze* again!"

The old woman did not reply but shook with laughter, as she had done just before, and then she ran off, giving the superintendent a look which said as plainly as words could have done: "Do you think I care a fig for you?"

Those insulting words were clearly written in her face, and at the same time I noticed that the old woman's eyes had utterly changed, for during that short moment of bravado the childish eyes had become the eyes of a monkey, of some ferocious, obstinate baboon.

This time, in spite of my dislike to question him further, I could not help saying to him: "That is Babette, I suppose?"

"Yes," he replied, growing rather red, as if he guessed that I understood the old woman's insulting looks.

"Is she the woman who is so precious?" I added with a touch of irony, which made him grow altogether crimson.

"That is she," he said, walking on quickly so as to escape my further questions.

But I was egged on by curiosity and I made a direct appeal to our host's complaisance: "I should like to see this *Frieze*," I said. "Who is *Frieze*?"

He turned round and said: "Oh! Nothing, nothing, he is not at all interesting. What is the good of seeing him? It is not worth while."

And he ran downstairs two steps at a time. He who was usually so minute and so very careful to explain everything was now in a hurry to get finished, and our visit was cut short.

The next day I had to leave that part of the country without hearing anything more about Babette, but I came back about four months later, when the shooting season began. I had not forgotten her during that time, for nobody could ever forget her eyes, and so I was very glad to have as my traveling companion on my three hours' diligence journey from the station to my friend's house a man who talked to me about her all the time.

He was a young magistrate whom I had already met and who had much interested me by his wit, by his close manner of observing

things, by his singularly refined casuistry and, above all, by the contrast between his professional severity and his tolerant philosophy.

But he never appeared so attractive to me as he did on that day when he told me the history of the mysterious Babette.

He had inquired into it and had applied all his facilities as an examining magistrate to it, for, like me, his visit to the asylum had roused his curiosity. This is what he had learned and what he told me:

When she was ten years old Babette had been violated by her own father and at thirteen had been sent to the house of correction for vagabondage and debauchery. From the time she was twenty until she was forty she had been a servant in the neighborhood, frequently changing her situations and being nearly everywhere her employer's mistress. She had ruined several families without getting any money herself and without gaining any definite position. A shopkeeper had committed suicide on her account, and a respectable young fellow had turned thief and incendiary and had finished at the hulks.

She had been married twice and had twice been left a widow, and for ten years, until she was fifty, she had been the only courtesan in the district.

"She was very pretty, I suppose?"

"No, she never was that. It seems she was short, thin, with no bust or hips, at her best, I am told, and nobody can remember that she was pretty, even when she was young."

"Then how can you explain?"

"How?" the magistrate exclaimed. "Well! What about the eyes? You could not have looked at them?"

"Yes, yes, you are right," I replied. "Those eyes explain many things, certainly. They are the eyes of an innocent child."

"Ah!" he exclaimed again enthusiastically. "Cleopatra, Diana of Poitiers, Ninon de l'Enclos, all the queens of love who were adored when they were growing old, must have had eyes like hers. A woman who has such eyes can never grow old. But if Babette lives to be a hundred she will always be loved as she has been and as she is."

"As she is! Bah! By whom, pray?"

"By all the old men in the asylum, by Jove; by all those who have preserved a fiber that can be touched, a corner of their heart that can be inflamed, or the least spark of desire left."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. And the superintendent loves her more than any of them."

"Impossible!"

"I would stake my head on it."

"Well, after all, it is possible and even probable; it is even certain. I now remember."

And I again saw the insulting, ferocious, familiar look which she had given the superintendent.

"And who is *La Frieze*?" I asked the magistrate suddenly. "I suppose you know that also?"

"He is a retired butcher who had both his legs frozen in the war of 1870 and of whom she is very fond. No doubt he is a cripple, with two wooden legs, but still a vigorous man enough, in spite of his fifty-three years. The loins of a Hercules and the face of a satyr. The superintendent is quite jealous of him!"

I thought the matter over again and it seemed very probable to me. "Does she love *La Frieze*?"

"Yes, he is the chosen lover."

When we arrived at the host's house a short time afterward we were surprised to find everybody in a terrible state of excitement. A crime had been committed in the asylum; the gendarmes were there, and our host was with them, so we instantly joined them. *La Frieze* had murdered the superintendent, and they gave us the details, which were horrible. The former butcher had hidden behind a door and, catching hold of the other, had rolled onto the ground with him and bitten him in the throat, tearing out his carotid artery, from which the blood spurted into the murderer's face.

I saw him, *La Frieze*. His fat face, which had been badly washed, was still bloodstained; he had a low forehead, square jaws, pointed ears sticking out from his head and flat nostrils, like the muzzle of some wild animal; but above all, I saw Babette.

She was smiling, and at that moment her eyes had not their monkey-like and ferocious expression; they were pleading and tender, full of the sweetest childlike candor.

"You know," my host said to me in a low voice, "that the poor woman has fallen into senile imbecility, and that is the cause of her looks, which are strange, considering the terrible sight she has seen."

"Do you think so?" the magistrate said. "You must remember that she is not yet sixty, and I do not think that it is a case of senile imbecility but that she is quite conscious of the crime that has been committed."

"Then why should she smile?"

"Because she is pleased at what she has done."

"Oh no! You are really too subtle!"

The magistrate suddenly turned to Babette and, looking at her steadily, he said:

"I suppose you know what has happened and why this crime was committed?"

She left off smiling, and her pretty, childlike eyes became abominable monkey's eyes again, and then the answer was suddenly to pull up her petticoats to show us the lower part of her limbs. Yes, the magistrate had been quite right. That old woman had been a Cleopatra, a Diana, a Ninon de l'Enclos, and the rest of her body had remained like a child's, even more than her eyes. We were thunder-struck at the sight.

"Pigs! Pigs!" *La Frieze* shouted to us. "You also want to have something to do with her!"

And I saw that actually the magistrate's face was pale and contracted and that his hands and lips trembled like those of a man caught in the act of doing wrong.

A COCK CROWED

MME BERTHA D'AVANCELLES had up till that time resisted all the prayers of her despairing adorer, Baron Joseph de Croissard. He had pursued her ardently in Paris during the winter, and now he was giving fetes and shooting parties in her honor at his château at Carville, in Normandy.

M. d'Avancelles, her husband, saw nothing and knew nothing, as usual. It was said that he lived apart from his wife on account of a physical weakness for which Mme d'Avancelles would not pardon him. He was a short, stout, bald man, with short arms, legs, neck, nose, and very ugly; while Mme d'Avancelles, on the contrary, was a tall, dark and determined young woman who laughed in her husband's face with sonorous peals while he called her openly "Mrs. Housewife." She looked at the broad shoulders, strong build and fair mustaches of her titled admirer, Baron Joseph de Croissard, with a certain amount of tenderness.

She had not, however, granted him anything as yet. The baron was ruining himself for her, and there was a constant round of feting, hunting parties and new pleasures to which he invited the neighboring nobility. All day long the hounds gave tongue in the woods as they followed the fox or the wild boar, and every night dazzling fireworks mingled their burning plumes with the stars while the illuminated windows of the drawing room cast long rays of light onto the wide lawns where shadows were moving to and fro.

It was autumn, the russet-colored season of the year, and the leaves

were whirling about on the grass like flights of birds. One noticed the smell of damp earth in the air, of the naked earth, like one scents the odor of the bare skin when a woman's dress falls off her after a ball.

One evening in the previous spring, during an entertainment, Mme d'Avancelles had said to M. de Croissard, who was worrying her by his importunities: "If I do succumb to you, my friend, it will not be before the fall of the leaf. I have too many things to do this summer to have any time for it." He had not forgotten that bold and amusing speech, and every day he became more pressing, every day he pushed his approaches nearer—to use a military phrase—and gained a hold on the heart of the fair, audacious woman who seemed only to be resisting for form's sake.

It was the day before a large wild-boar hunt, and in the evening Mme Bertha said to the baron with a laugh: "Baron, if you kill the brute, I shall have something to say to you." And so at dawn he was up and out, to try and discover where the solitary animal had its lair. He accompanied his huntsmen, settled the places for the relays and organized everything personally to insure his triumph. When the horns gave the signal for setting out he appeared in a closely fitting coat of scarlet and gold, with his waist drawn in tight, his chest expanded, his eyes radiant and as fresh and strong as if he had just got out of bed. They set off; the wild boar bolted through the underwood as soon as he was dislodged, followed by the hounds in full cry, while the horses set off at a gallop through the narrow side-cuts in the forest. The carriages which followed the chase at a distance drove noiselessly along the soft roads.

From mischief Mme d'Avancelles kept the baron by her side, lagging behind at a walk in an interminably long and straight drive, over which four rows of oaks hung so as to form almost an arch, while he, trembling with love and anxiety, listened with one ear to the young woman's bantering chatter and with the other to the blast of the horns and to the cry of the hounds as they receded in the distance.

"So you do not love me any longer?" she observed.

"How can you say such things?" he replied.

And she continued: "But you seem to be paying more attention to the sport than to me."

He groaned and said: "Did you not order me to kill the animal myself?"

And she replied gravely: "Of course I reckon upon it. You must kill it under my eyes."

Then he trembled in his saddle, spurred his horse until it reared and, losing all patience, exclaimed: "But, by Jove, madame, that is impossible if we remain here."

Then she spoke tenderly to him, laying her hand on his arm or stroking his horse's mane, as if from abstraction, and said with a laugh: "But you must do it—or else so much the worse for you."

Just then they turned to the right into a narrow path which was overhung by trees, and suddenly, to avoid a branch which barred their way, she leaned toward him so closely that he felt her hair tickling his neck. Suddenly he threw his arms brutally round her, and putting his heavily mustached mouth to her forehead, he gave her a furious kiss.

At first she did not move and remained motionless under that mad caress; then she turned her head with a jerk, and either by accident or design her little lips met his, under their wealth of light hair, and a moment afterward, either from confusion or remorse, she struck her horse with her riding whip and went off at full gallop, and they rode on like that for some time, without exchanging a look.

The noise of the hunt came nearer; the thickets seemed to tremble, and suddenly the wild boar broke through the bushes, covered with blood and trying to shake off the hounds who had fastened onto him, and the baron, uttering a shout of triumph, exclaimed: "Let him who loves me follow me!" And he disappeared in the copse as if the wood had swallowed him up.

When she reached an open glade a few minutes later he was just getting up, covered with mud, his coat torn and his hands bloody, while the brute was lying stretched out at full length with the baron's hunting knife driven into its shoulder up to the hilt.

The quarry was cut at night by torchlight. It was a warm and dull evening, and the wan moon threw a yellow light onto the torches which made the night misty with their resinous smoke. The hounds devoured the wild boar's entrails and snarled and fought for them, while the prickers and the gentlemen, standing in a circle round the spoil, blew their horns as loud as they could. The flourish of the hunting horns resounded beyond the woods on that still night and was repeated by the echoes of the distant valleys, awakening the timid stags, rousing the yelping foxes and disturbing the little rabbits in their gambols at the edge of the rides.

The frightened night birds flew over the eager pack of hounds, while the women, who were moved by all these strangely picturesque things, leaned rather heavily on the men's arms and turned aside into the forest rides before the hounds had finished their meal. Mme d'Avancelles, feeling languid after that day of fatigue and tenderness, said to the baron: "Will you take a turn in the park, my friend?" And without replying, but trembling and nervous, he went with her, and immediately they kissed each other. They walked slowly under the

almost leafless trees through which the moonbeams filtered, and their love, their desires, their longing for a closer embrace became so vehement that they nearly yielded to it at the foot of a tree.

The horns were not sounding any longer, and the tired hounds were sleeping in the kennels. "Let us return," the young woman said, and they went back.

When they got to the château and before they went in she said in a weak voice: "I am so tired that I shall go to bed, my friend." And as he opened his arms for a last kiss she ran away, saying as a last good-by: "No—I am going to sleep. Let him who loves me follow me!"

An hour later, when the whole silent château seemed dead, the baron crept stealthily out of his room and went and scratched at her door. As she did not reply he tried to open it and found that it was not locked.

She was in a reverie, resting her arms against the window ledge. He threw himself at her kness, which he kissed madly through her dress. She said nothing but buried her delicate fingers caressingly in his hair, and suddenly, as if she had formed some great resolution, whispered with a daring look: "I shall come back; wait for me." And, stretching out her hand, she pointed with her finger to an indistinct white spot at the end of the room; it was her bed.

Then with trembling hands, and scarcely knowing what he was doing, he quickly undressed, got into the cool sheets and, stretching himself out comfortably, almost forgot his love in the pleasure he found, tired out as he was, in the contact of the linen. She did not return, however, no doubt finding amusement in making him languish. He closed his eyes with a feeling of exquisite comfort and reflected peaceably while waiting for what he so ardently longed for. But by degrees his limbs grew languid and his thoughts became indistinct and fleeting, until his fatigue gained the upper hand and he fell asleep.

He slept that unconquerable heavy sleep of the worn-out hunter, slept through until daylight. Then, as the window had remained half open, the crowing of a cock suddenly woke him. The baron opened his eyes, and feeling a woman's body against his—finding himself, much to his surprise, in a strange bed, and remembering nothing for the moment—he stammered:

"What? Where am I? What is the matter?"

Then she, who had not been asleep at all, looking at this unkempt man with red eyes and swollen lips, replied in the haughty tone of voice in which she occasionally spoke to her husband:

"It is nothing; it is only a cock crowing. Go to sleep again, monsieur, it has nothing to do with you."

LILIE LALA

"WHEN I SAW HER for the first time," Louis d'Arandel said, with the look of a man who was dreaming and trying to recollect something, "I thought of some slow and yet passionate music that I once heard, though I do not remember who was the composer. It told of a fair-haired woman whose hair was so silky, so golden and so vibrating that her lover had it cut off after her death and had the strings of the magic bow of a violin made out of it, which afterward emitted such superhuman complaints and love melodies that they made its hearers love until death.

"In her eyes there lay the mystery of deep waters; one was lost in them, drowned in them like in fathomless depths, and at the corners of her mouth there lurked the despotic and merciless smile of those women who do not fear that they may be conquered, who rule over men like cruel queens, whose hearts remain as virgin as those of the strictest Carmelite nuns amid a flood of lewdness.

"I have seen her angelic head, the bands of her hair which looked like plates of gold, her tall, graceful figure, her white, slender, childish hands, in stained-glass windows in churches. She suggested pictures of the Annunciation, where the Archangel Gabriel descends with ultramarine-colored wings and Mary is sitting at her spinning wheel and spinning while uttering pious prayers, seemingly a tall sister to the white lilies that are growing beside her and the roses.

"When she went through the acacia alley she appeared on some first night in the stage box at one of the theaters, nearly always alone and apparently feeling life a great burden and angry because she could not change the eternal, dull round of human enjoyment; nobody would have believed that she went in for a fast life—that in the annals of gallantry she was catalogued under the strange name of 'Lilie Lala' and that no man could rub against her without being irretrievably caught and spending his last halfpenny on her.

"But with all that Lilie had the voice of a schoolgirl, of some little innocent creature who still uses a skipping rope and wears short dresses, and had that clear, innocent laugh which reminds people of wedding bells. Sometimes, for fun, I would kneel down before her, like before the statue of a saint, and clasping my hands as if in prayer, I used to say: *'Sancta Lilie, ora pro nobis!'*

"One evening at Biarritz, when the sky had the dull glare of intense heat and the sea was of a sinister, inky black and was swelling and rolling in enormous phosphorescent waves on the beach at Port-Vieux,

Lilie, who was listless and strange and was making holes in the sand with the heels of her boots, suddenly exclaimed in one of those confidences which women sometimes bestow and for which they are sorry as soon as the story is told:

"Ah! My dear fellow, I do not deserve to be canonized, and my life is rather a subject for a drama than a chapter from the Gospels or the *Golden Legend*. As long as I can remember anything I can remember being wrapped in lace, being carried by a woman and continually being fussed over, as are children who have been long waited for and who are consequently spoiled more than usual.

"Those kisses were so nice that I still seem to feel their sweetness, and I shrine the remembrance of them in a little place in my heart, as one preserves some lucky talisman in a reliquary. I still seem to remember an indistinct landscape lost in the mist, outlines of trees which frightened me as they creaked and groaned in the wind and ponds on which swans were sailing. And when I look in the glass for a long time, merely for the sake of seeing myself, it seems to me as if I recognize the woman who formerly used to kiss me most frequently and speak to me in a more loving voice than anyone else did. But what happened afterward?

"Was I carried off or sold to some strolling circus owner by a dishonest servant? I do not know; I have never been able to find out, but I remember that my whole childhood was spent in a circus which traveled from fair to fair and from place to place, with files of vans, processions of animals and noisy music.

"I was as tiny as an insect, and they taught me difficult tricks, to dance on the tightrope and to perform on the slackrope. I was beaten as if I had been a bit of plaster, and more frequently I had a piece of dry bread to gnaw than a slice of meat. But I remember that one day I slipped under one of the vans and stole a basin of soup as my share, which one of the clowns was carefully making for his three learned dogs.

"I had neither friends nor relations; I was employed on the dirtiest jobs, like the lowest stable help, and I was tattooed with bruises and scars. Of the whole company, however, the one who beat me the most, who was the least sparing of his thumps and who continually made me suffer, as if it gave him pleasure, was the manager and proprietor, a kind of old, vicious brute, whom everybody feared like the plague, a miser who was continually complaining of the receipts, who hid away the crown pieces in his mattress, invested his money in the funds and cut down the salaries of all as far as he could.

"His name was Rapha Ginestous. Any other child but myself would have succumbed to such a constant martyrdom, but I grew up,

and the more I grew the prettier and more desirable I became, so that when I was fifteen men were already beginning to write love letters to me and to throw bouquets to me in the arena. I felt also that all the men in the company were watching me and were coveting me as their prey; that their lustful looks rested on my pink tights and followed the graceful outlines of my body when I was posing on the rope that stretched from one end of the circus to the other or jumped through the paper hoops at full gallop.

"They were no longer the same and spoke to me in a totally different tone of voice. They tried to come into my dressing room when I was changing my dress, and Rapha Ginestous seemed to have lost his head, and his heart throbbed audibly when he came near me. Yes, he had the audacity to propose bargains to me which covered my cheeks and forehead with blushes and which filled me with disgust, and as I felt a fierce hatred for him and detested him with all my soul and all my strength, as I wished to make him suffer the tortures which he had inflicted on me a hundredfold, I used him as the target at which I was constantly aiming.

"Instinctively I employed every cunning perfidy, every artful coquetry, every lie, every artifice that can unset the strongest and most skeptical and place them at our mercy like submissive animals. He loved me; he really loved me, that lascivious goat who had never seen anything in a woman except a soft couch and an instrument of convenience and of forgetfulness. He loved me like old men do love, with frenzy, with degrading transports and with the prostration of his will and of his strength. I held him as in a leash and did whatever I liked with him.

"I was much more manageress than he was manager, and the poor wretch wasted away in vain hopes and in useless transports; he had not even touched the tips of my fingers and was reduced to bestowing his caresses on my columbine shoes, my tights and my wigs. And I cared not *that* for it, you understand! Not the slightest familiarity did I allow, and he began to grow thin and ill and became idiotic. And while he implored me and promised to marry me, with his eyes full of tears, I shouted with laughter; I reminded him of how he had beaten, abused and humiliated me and had often made me wish for death. And as soon as he left me he would swill bottles of gin and whisky and constantly got so abominably drunk that he rolled under the table and all to drown his sorrow and forget his desire.

"He covered me with jewels and tried everything he could to tempt me to become his wife. In spite of my inexperience in life he consulted me with regard to everything he undertook, and one evening, after I had stroked his face with my hand, I persuaded him without any diffi-

culty to make his will, by which he left me all his savings and the circus and everything belonging to it.

"It was in the middle of winter, near Moscow; it snowed continually, and one almost burnt oneself at the stoves in trying to keep warm. Rapha Ginestous had had supper brought into the largest van, which was his, after the performance, and for hours we ate and drank. I was very nice toward him and filled his glass every moment; I even sat on his knee and kissed him. And all his love and the fumes of the alcohol of the wine mounted to his head and gradually made him so helplessly intoxicated that he fell from his chair, inert, as if he had been struck by lightning, without opening his eyes or saying a word.

"The rest of the troupe were asleep; the lights were out in all the little windows, and not a sound was to be heard, while the snow continued to fall in large flakes. So having put out the petroleum lamp, I opened the door and, taking the drunkard by the feet, as if he had been a bale of goods, I threw him out into that white shroud.

"The next morning the stiff and convulsed body of Rapha Ginestous was picked up, and as everybody knew his inveterate drinking habits, no one thought of instituting an inquiry or of accusing me of a crime. Thus was I avenged and gained a yearly income of nearly fifteen thousand francs.¹ What, after all, is the good of being honest and of pardoning our enemies, as the Gospel bids us?"

"And now," Louis d'Arandel said in conclusion, "suppose we go and have a cocktail or two at the casino, for I do not think that I have ever talked so much in my life before."

A VAGABOND

FOR MORE THAN A MONTH Randel had been walking, seeking for work everywhere. He had left his native place, Ville-Avary, in the department of La Manche because there was no work to be had. He was a journeyman carpenter, twenty-seven years old, a steady fellow and good workman, but for two months he, the eldest son, had been obliged to live on his family, with nothing to do but loaf in the general stoppage of work. Bread was getting scarce with them; the two sisters went out as charwomen but earned little, and he, Jacques Randel, the strongest of them all, did nothing because he had nothing to do and ate the others' bread.

Then he went and inquired at the town hall, and the mayor's secretary told him that he would find work at the labor center. So he

¹ About \$3000.

started, well provided with papers and certificates and carrying another pair of shoes, a pair of trousers and a shirt in a blue handkerchief at the end of his stick.

He had walked almost without stopping, day and night, along interminable roads, in the sun and rain, without every reaching that mysterious country where workmen find work. At first he had the fixed idea that he must only work at his own trade, but at every carpenter's shop where he applied he was told that they had just dismissed men on account of work being so slack, and finding himself at the end of his resources, he made up his mind to undertake any job that he might come across on the road. And so by turns he was a navvy, stableman, stone sawyer; he split wood, lopped the branches of trees, dug wells, mixed mortar, tied up fagots, tended goats on a mountain, and all for a few pence, for he only obtained two or three days' work occasionally, by offering himself at a shamefully low price in order to tempt the avarice of employers and peasants.

And now for a week he had found nothing, and he had no money left. He was eating a piece of bread, thanks to the charity of some women from whom he had begged at house doors on the road. It was getting dark, and Jacques Randel, jaded, his legs failing him, his stomach empty and with despair in his heart, was walking barefoot on the grass by the side of the road, for he was taking care of his last pair of shoes, the other pair having already ceased to exist for a long time. It was a Saturday toward the end of autumn. The heavy gray clouds were being driven rapidly among the trees, and one felt that it would rain soon. The country was deserted at that time of the evening and on the eve of Sunday. Here and there in the fields there rose up stacks of thrashed-out corn like huge yellow mushrooms, and the fields looked bare, as they had already been sown for the next year.

Randel was hungry with the hunger of some wild animal, such a hunger as drives wolves to attack men. Worn out and weakened with fatigue, he took longer strides so as not to take so many steps, and with heavy head, the blood throbbing in his temples, with red eyes and dry mouth he grasped his stick tightly in his hand with a longing to strike the first passer-by whom he should meet, and who might be going home to supper, with all his force.

He looked at the sides of the road with the image of potatoes dug up and lying on the ground before his eyes; if he had found any he would have gathered some dead wood, made a fire in the ditch and have had a capital supper off the warm, round tubers, which he would first of all have held burning hot in his cold hands. But it was too late in the year, and he would have to gnaw a raw beetroot as he had done the day before, having picked one up in a field.

For the last two days he had spoken aloud as he quickened his step, under the influence of his thoughts. He had never done much thinking hitherto, as he had given all his mind, all his simple faculties, to his industrial requirements. But now fatigue and this desperate search for work which he could not get, refusals and rebuffs, nights spent in the open air lying on the grass, long fasting, the contempt which he knew people with a settled abode felt for a vagabond, the question which he was continually asked: "Why did you not remain at home?" distress at not being able to use his strong arms which he felt so full of vigor, the recollection of his relations who had remained at home and who also had not a halfpenny, filled him by degrees with a rage which was accumulating every day, every hour, every minute, and which now escaped his lips in spite of himself in short growling sentences.

As he stumbled over the stones which rolled beneath his bare feet he grumbled: "How wretched! how miserable! A set of hogs, to let a man die of hunger, a carpenter. A set of hogs—not twopence—not twopence. And now it is raining—a set of hogs!"

He was indignant at the injustice of fate and cast the blame on men, on all men, because Nature, that great, blind mother, is unjust, cruel and perfidious, and he repeated through his clenched teeth, "A set of hogs," as he looked at the thin gray smoke which rose from the roofs, for it was the dinner hour. And without thinking about that other injustice, which is human and which is called robbery and violence, he felt inclined to go into one of those houses to murder the inhabitants and to sit down to table in their stead.

He said to himself: "I have a right to live, and they are letting me die of hunger—and yet I only ask for work—a set of hogs!" And the pain in his limbs, the gnawing in his heart, rose to his head like terrible intoxication and gave rise to this simple thought in his brain: "I have the right to live because I breathe and because the air is the common property of everybody, and so nobody has the right to leave me without bread!"

A thick, fine, icy-cold rain was coming down, and he stopped and murmured: "How miserable! Another month of walking before I get home." He was indeed returning home then, for he saw that he should more easily find work in his native town where he was known—and he did not mind what he did—than on the highroads where everybody suspected him. As the carpentering business was not going well he would turn day laborer, be a mason's hodman, ditcher, break stones on the road. If he only earned tenpence a day, that would at any rate find him something to eat.

He tied the remains of his last pocket handkerchief round his neck

to prevent the cold water from running down his back and chest, but he soon found that it was penetrating the thin material of which his clothes were made, and he glanced round him with the agonized look of a man who does not know where to hide his body and to rest his head and has no place of shelter in the whole world.

Night came on and wrapped the country in obscurity, and in the distance, in a meadow, he saw a dark spot on the grass; it was a cow, and so he got over the ditch by the roadside and went up to her without exactly knowing what he was doing. When he got close to her she raised her great head to him, and he thought: "If I only had a jug I could get a little milk." He looked at the cow, and the cow looked at him, and then suddenly, giving her a violent kick in the side, he said: "Get up!"

The animal got up slowly, letting her heavy udder hang down below her; then the man lay down on his back between the animal's legs and drank for a long time, squeezing the warm swollen teats which tasted of the cow stall with both hands, and drank as long as any milk remained in that living well. But the icy rain began to fall more heavily, and he saw no place of shelter on the whole of that bare plain. He was cold, and he looked at a light which was shining among the trees in the window of a house.

The cow had lain down again, heavily, and he sat down by her side and stroked her head, grateful for the nourishment she had given him. The animal's strong thick breath, which came out of her nostrils like two jets of steam in the evening air, blew onto the workman's face, who said: "You are not cold inside there!" He put his hands onto her chest and under her legs to find some warmth there, and then the idea struck him that he might pass the night against that large, warm stomach. So he found a comfortable place and laid his forehead against the great udder from which he had quenched his thirst just previously, and then, as he was worn out with fatigue, he fell asleep immediately.

He woke up, however, several times, with his back or his stomach half frozen, according as he put one or the other to the animal's flank. Then he turned over to warm and dry that part of his body which had remained exposed to the night air, and he soon went soundly to sleep again.

The crowing of a cock woke him; the day was breaking, it was no longer raining and the sky was bright. The cow was resting with her muzzle on the ground, and he stooped down, resting on his hands, to kiss those wide nostrils of moist flesh and said: "Good-by, my beauty, until next time. You are a nice animal! Good-by." Then he put on his shoes and went off, and for two hours he walked straight on before

him, always following the same road, and then he felt so tired that he sat down on the grass. It was broad daylight by that time, and the church bells were ringing; men in blue blouses, women in white caps, some on foot, some in carts, began to pass along the road, going to the neighboring villages to spend Sunday with friends or relations.

A stout peasant came in sight, driving a score of frightened, bleating sheep in front of him whom an active dog kept together, so Randel got up and, raising his cap, he said: "You do not happen to have any work for a man who is dying of hunger?" But the other, giving an angry look at the vagabond, replied: "I have no work for fellows whom I meet on the road."

And the carpenter went back and sat down by the side of the ditch again. He waited there for a long time, watching the country people pass and looking for a kind, compassionate face before he renewed his request, and finally selected a man in an overcoat, whose stomach was adorned with a gold chain. "I have been looking for work," he said, "for the last two months and cannot find any, and I have not a halfpenny in my pocket."

But the semigentleman replied: "You should have read the notice which is stuck up at the beginning of the village: 'Begging is prohibited within the boundaries of this parish.' Let me tell you that I am the mayor, and if you do not get out of here pretty quickly, I shall have you arrested."

Randel, who was getting angry, replied: "Have me arrested if you like; I should prefer it, for at any rate I should not die of hunger." And he went back and sat down by the side of his ditch again, and in about a quarter of an hour two gendarmes appeared on the road. They were walking slowly, side by side, well in sight, glittering in the sun with their shining hats, their yellow accouterments and their metal buttons, as if to frighten evildoers and to put them to flight at a distance. He knew that they were coming after him, but he did not move, for he was seized with a sudden desire to defy them, to be arrested by them and to have his revenge later.

They came on without appearing to have seen him, walking with military steps, heavily, and balancing themselves as if they were doing the goose step; and then suddenly, as they passed him, they noticed him and stopped, looking at him angrily and threateningly. The brigadier came up to him and asked: "What are you doing here?"

"I am resting," the man replied calmly.

"Where do you come from?"

"If I had to tell you all the places I have been to, it would take me more than an hour."

"Where are you going to?"

"To Ville-Avary."

"Where is that?"

"In La Manche."

"Is that where you belong to?"

"It is."

"Why did you leave it?"

"To try for work."

The brigadier turned to his gendarme and said, in the angry voice of a man who is exasperated at last by the same trick: "They all say that, these scamps. I know all about it." And then he continued: "Have you any papers?"

"Yes, I have some."

"Give them to me."

Randel took his papers out of his pocket, his certificates, those poor worn-out dirty papers which were falling to pieces, and gave them to the soldier, who spelled them through, hemming and hawing, and then, having seen that they were all in order, he gave them back to Randel with the dissatisfied look of a man whom someone cleverer than himself has tricked.

After a few moments' further reflection he asked him: "Have you any money on you?"

"No."

"None whatever?"

"None."

"Not even a sou?"

"Not even a soul!"

"How do you live then?"

"On what people give me."

"Then you beg?"

And Randel answered resolutely: "Yes, when I can."

Then the gendarme said: "I have caught you on the highroad in the act of vagabondage and begging, without any resources or trade, and so I command you to come with me."

The carpenter got up and said: "Wherever you please." And placing himself between the two soldiers, even before he had received the order to do so, he added: "Come, lock me up; that will at any rate put a roof over my head when it rains."

And they set off toward the village, whose red tiles could be seen through the leafless trees, a quarter of a league off. Service was just going to begin when they went through the village. The square was full of people who immediately formed two hedges to see the criminal, who was being followed by a crowd of excited children, pass. Male and female peasants looked at the prisoner between the two gendarmes

with hatred in their eyes and a longing to throw stones at him, to tear his skin with their nails, to trample him under their feet. They asked each other whether he had committed murder or robbery. The butcher, who was an ex-spahi, declared that he was a deserter. The tobacconist thought that he recognized him as the man who had that very morning passed a bad half-franc piece off on him, and the ironmonger declared that he was the murderer of Widow Malet, for whom the police had been looking for six months.

In the hall of the municipal council, into which his custodians took him, Randel saw the mayor again, sitting on the magisterial bench with the schoolmaster by his side.

"Ah! ah!" the magistrate exclaimed, "so here you are again, my fellow. I told you I should have you locked up. Well, Brigadier, what is he charged with?"

"He is a vagabond without house or home, Monsieur le Maire, without any resources or money, so he says, who was arrested in the act of begging, but he is provided with good testimonials, and his papers are all in order."

"Show me his papers," the mayor said. He took them, read them, reread, returned them and then said: "Search him"; they searched him but found nothing, and the mayor seemed perplexed and asked the workman:

"What were you doing on the road this morning?"

"I was looking for work."

"Work? On the highroad?"

"How do you expect me to find any if I hide in the woods?"

They looked at each other with the hatred of two wild beasts which belong to different hostile species, and the magistrate continued: "I am going to have you set at liberty, but do not be brought up before me again."

To which the carpenter replied: "I would rather you locked me up; I have had enough running about the country."

But the magistrate replied severely: "Be silent." And then he said to the two gendarmes: "You will conduct this man two hundred yards from the village and let him continue his journey."

"At any rate give me something to eat," the workman said, but the other grew indignant. "It only remains for us to feed you! Ah! ah! ah! that is rather strong!"

But Randel went on firmly: "If you let me nearly die of hunger again, you will force me to commit a crime, and then so much the worse for you other fat fellows."

The mayor had risen, and he repeated: "Take him away immediately, or I shall end by getting angry."

The two gendarmes thereupon seized the carpenter by the arms and dragged him out. He allowed them to do it without resistance, passed through the village again and found himself on the highroad once more; and when the men had accompanied him two hundred yards beyond the village the brigadier said: "Now off with you, and do not let me catch you about here again, for if I do, you will know it."

Randel went off without replying or knowing where he was going. He walked on for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, so stupefied that he no longer thought of anything. But suddenly, as he was passing a small house where the window was half open, the smell of the soup and boiled meat stopped him suddenly in front of it, and hunger, fierce, devouring, maddening hunger, seized him and almost drove him against the walls of the house like a wild beast.

He said aloud, in a grumbling voice: "In heaven's name, they must give me some this time." And he began to knock at the door vigorously with his stick, and as nobody came he knocked louder and called out: "Hallo! you people in there, open the door!" And then, as nothing moved, he went up to the window and pushed it open with his hand, and the close warm air of the kitchen, full of the smell of hot soup, meat and cabbage, escaped into the cold outer air, and with a bound the carpenter was in the house. Two covers were laid on the table; no doubt the proprietors of the house, on going to church, had left their dinner on the fire, their nice Sunday boiled beef and vegetable soup, while there was a loaf of new bread on the chimney piece between two bottles which seemed full.

Randel seized the bread first of all and broke it with as much violence as if he were strangling a man, and then he began to eat it voraciously, swallowing great mouthfuls quickly. But almost immediately the smell of the meat attracted him to the fireplace, and having taken off the lid of the saucepan, he plunged a fork into it and brought out a large piece of beef tied with a string. Then he took more cabbage, carrots and onions until his plate was full, and having put it on the table, he sat down before it, cut the meat into four pieces and dined as if he had been at home. When he had eaten nearly all the meat, besides a quantity of vegetables, he felt thirsty and took one of the bottles off the mantelpiece.

Scarcely had he poured the liquor into his glass than he saw it was brandy. So much the better; it was warming, it would instill some fire into his veins, and that would be all right, after being so cold; and he drank some. He found it very good, certainly, for he had grown unaccustomed to it, and he poured himself out another glassful which he drank at two gulps. And then almost immediately he felt quite

merry and lighthearted from the effect of the alcohol, just as if some great happiness were flowing through his system.

He continued to eat, but more slowly, dipping his bread into the soup. His skin had become burning, and especially his forehead, where the veins were throbbing. But suddenly the church bells began to ring. Mass was over, and instinct rather than fear, the instinct of prudence which guides all beings and makes them clear-sighted in danger, made the carpenter get up. He put the remains of the loaf into one pocket and the brandy bottle into the other, and he furtively went to the window and looked out into the road. It was still deserted, so he jumped out and set off walking again, but instead of following the highroad he ran across the fields toward a wood which he saw a little way off.

He felt alert, strong, lighthearted, glad of what he had done and so nimble that he sprang over the inclosures of the fields at a single bound, and as soon as he was under the trees he took the bottle out of his pocket again and began to drink once more, swallowing it down as he walked, and then his ideas began to get confused, his eyes grew dim and his legs elastic as springs, and he started singing the old popular song:

*"Oh! how nice, how nice it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries."*

He was now walking on thick, damp, cool moss, and the soft carpet under his feet made him feel absurdly inclined to turn head over heels, like he used to do as a child; so he took a run, turned a somersault, got up and began over again. And between each time he began to sing again:

*"Oh! how nice, how nice it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries."*

Suddenly he found himself on the edge of a sunken road, and in the road he saw a tall girl, a servant who was returning to the village with two pails of milk. He watched, stooping down and with his eyes as bright as those of a dog who scents a quail, but she saw him, raised her head and said: "Was that you singing like that?" He did not reply, however, but jumped down into the road, although it was at least six feet down, and when she saw him suddenly standing in front of her she exclaimed: "Oh dear, how you frightened me!"

But he did not hear her, for he was drunk, he was mad, excited by another requirement which was more imperative than hunger, more feverish than alcohol; by the irresistible fury of the man who has been in want of everything for two months and who is drunk, who is young,

ardent and inflamed by all the appetites which nature has implanted in the flesh of vigorous men.

The girl started back from him, frightened at his face, his eyes, his half-open mouth, his outstretched hands, but he seized her by the shoulders and without a word threw her down in the road.

She let her two pails fall, and they rolled over noisily and all the milk was spilt, and then she screamed, but comprehending that it would be of no use to call for help in that lonely spot and seeing that he was not going to make an attempt on her life, she yielded without much difficulty and not very angrily either, for he was a strong, handsome young fellow and really not rough.

When she got up the thought of her overturned pails suddenly filled her with fury, and taking off one of her wooden clogs, she threw it, in her turn, at the man to break his head since he did not pay her for her milk.

But he, mistaking the reason for this sudden violent attack, somewhat sobered and frightened at what he had done, ran off as fast as he could while she threw stones at him, some of which hit him in the back.

He ran for a long time, very long, until he felt more tired than he had ever been before. His legs were so weak that they could scarcely carry him; all his ideas were confused; he lost the recollection of everything and could no longer think about anything, and so he sat down at the foot of a tree and in five minutes was fast asleep. He was soon awakened, however, by a rough shake, and on opening his eyes he saw two cocked hats of polished leather bending over him and the two gendarmes of the morning, who were holding him and binding his arms.

"I knew I should catch you again," said the brigadier jeeringly. But Randel got up without replying. The two men shook him, quite ready to ill-treat him if he made a movement, for he was their prey now; he had become a jailbird, caught by hunters of criminals who would not let him go again.

"Now, start!" the brigadier said, and they set off. It was getting evening, and the autumn twilight was settling, heavy and dark, over the land, and in half an hour they reached the village, where every door was open, for the people had heard what had happened. Peasants and peasant women and girls, excited with anger, as if every man had been robbed and every woman violated, wished to see the wretch brought back, so that they might overwhelm him with abuse. They hooted him from the first house in the village until they reached the mansion house, where the mayor was waiting for him. Eager to avenge himself on this vagabond as soon as he saw him, he cried:

"Ah! my fine fellow! Here we are!" And he rubbed his hands, more pleased than he usually was, and continued: "I said so. I said so the moment I saw him in the road." And then with increased satisfaction: "Oh! you blackguard! Oh! you dirty blackguard! You will get your twenty years, my fine fellow!"

THE MOUNTEBANKS

COMPARIDON, the clever manager of the Eden Réunis Theater, as the theater critics invariably called him, was reckoning on a great success and had invested his last franc in the affair without thinking of the morrow or of the bad luck which had been pursuing him so inexorably for months past. For a whole week the walls, the kiosks, shop fronts and even the trees had been placarded with flaming posters, and from one end of Paris to the other carriages were to be seen which were covered with fancy sketches by Chéret, representing two strong, well-built men who looked like ancient athletes. The younger of them, who was standing with his arms folded, had the vacant smile of an itinerant mountebank, and the other, who was dressed in what was supposed to be the costume of a Mexican trapper, held a revolver in his hand. There were large-type advertisements in all the papers that the Montefiores would appear without fail at the Eden Réunis the next Monday.

Nothing else was talked about, for the puff and humbug attracted people. The Montefiores, like fashionable knickknacks, succeeded that whimsical jade, Rose Péché, who had gone off the preceding autumn between the third and fourth acts of the burlesque, *Ousca Iscar*, in order to make a study of love in company of a young fellow of seventeen who had just entered the university. The novelty and difficulty of their performance revived and agitated the curiosity of the public, for there seemed to be an implied threat of death or at any rate, of wounds and of blood in it, and it seemed as if they defied danger with absolute indifference. And that always pleases women; it holds them and masters them, and they grow pale with emotion and cruel enjoyment. Consequently all the seats in the large theater were let almost immediately and were soon taken for several days in advance. And stout Comparidin, losing his glass of absinthe over a game of dominoes, was in high spirits, seeing the future through rosy glasses, and exclaimed in a loud voice: "I think I have turned up trumps, by George!"

The Countess Regina de Villégby was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, languidly fanning herself. She had only received three or four

intimate friends that day, Saint Mars Montalvin, Tom Sheffield and her cousin, Mme de Rhouel, a Creole, who laughed as incessantly as a bird sings. It was growing dusk, and the distant rumbling of the carriages in the avenue of the Champs Elysées sounded like some somnolent rhythm. There was a delicate perfume of flowers; the lamps had not been brought in yet, and chatting and laughing filled the room with a confused noise.

"Would you pour out the tea?" the countess said, suddenly touching Saint Mars's fingers, who was beginning an amorous conversation in a low voice, with her fan. And while he slowly filled the little china cup he continued: "Are the Montefiores as good as the lying newspapers make out?"

Then Tom Sheffield and the others all joined in. They had never seen anything like it, they declared; it was most exciting and made one shiver unpleasantly, as when the *espada* comes to close quarters with the infuriated brute at a bullfight.

Countess Regina listened in silence and nibbled the petals of a tea rose.

"How I should like to see them!" giddy Mme de Rhouel exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, Cousin," the countess said in the solemn tones of a preacher, "a respectable woman dare not let herself be seen in improper places."

They all agreed with her. Nevertheless, Countess de Villégby was present at the Montefiores' performance two days later, dressed all in black and wearing a thick veil, at the back of a stage box.

Mme de Villégby was as cold as a steel buckler. She had married as soon as she left the convent in which she had been educated, without any affection or even liking for her husband; the most skeptical respected her as a saint, and she had a look of virgin purity on her calm face as she went down the steps of the Madeleine on Sundays after high mass.

Countess Regina stretched herself nervously, grew pale and trembled like the strings of a violin on which an artist had been playing some wild symphony. She inhaled the nasty smell of the sawdust, as if it had been the perfume of a bouquet of unknown flowers; she clenched her hands and gazed eagerly at the two mountebanks whom the public applauded rapturously at every feat. And contemptuously and haughtily she compared those two men, who were as vigorous as wild animals that have grown up in the open air, with the rickety limbs that look so awkward in the dress of an English groom.

Count de Villégby had gone back to the country to prepare for his

election as councilor general, and the very evening that he started Regina again took the stage box at the Eden Réunis. Consumed by sensual ardor, as if by some love philter, she scribbled a few words on a piece of paper—the eternal formula that women write on such occasions.

"A carriage will be waiting for you at the stage door after the performance—*An unknown woman who adores you.*"

And then she gave it to a box opener, who handed it to the Montefiore who was the champion pistol shot.

Oh, that interminable waiting in a malorous cab, the overwhelming emotion and the nausea of disgust, the fear, the desire of waking the coachman who was nodding on the box, of giving him her address and telling him to drive her home! But she remained with her face against the window, mechanically watching the dark passage illuminated by a gas lamp at the "actors' entrance" through which men were continually hurrying who talked in a loud voice and chewed the end of cigars which had gone out. She sat as if she were glued to the cushions and tapped impatiently on the bottom of the cab with her heels.

When the actor, who thought it was a joke, made his appearance, she could hardly utter a word, for evil pleasure is as intoxicating as adulterated liquor. So face to face with this immediate surrender and this unconstrained immodesty, he at first thought that he had to do with a streetwalker.

Regina felt various sensations and a morbid pleasure throughout her whole person. She pressed close to him and raised her veil to show how young, beautiful and desirable she was. They did not speak a word, like wrestlers before a combat. She was eager to be locked up with him, to give herself to him and, at last, to know that moral uncleanness of which she was, of course, ignorant as a chaste wife; and when they left the room in the hotel together, where they had spent hours like amorous deer, the man dragged himself along and almost groped his way like a blind man, while Regina was smiling, though she exhibited the serene candor of an unsullied virgin, like she did on Sundays after mass.

Then she took the second. He was very sentimental, and his head was full of romance. He thought the unknown woman, who merely used him as her plaything, really loved him, and he was not satisfied with furtive meetings. He questioned her, besought her, and the countess made fun of him. Then she chose the two mountebanks in turn. They did not know it, for she had forbidden them ever to talk about her to each other under the penalty of never seeing her again,

and one night the younger of them said with humble tenderness as he knelt at her feet:

"How kind you are to love me and to want me! I thought that such happiness only existed in novels and that ladies of rank only made fun of poor strolling mountebanks like us!"

Regina knitted her golden brows.

"Do not be angry," he continued, "because I followed you and found out where you lived and your real name and that you are a countess and rich, very rich."

"You fool!" she exclaimed, trembling with anger. "People make you believe things as easily as they can a child!"

She had had enough of him; he knew her name and might compromise her. The count might possibly come back from the country before the elections, and then the mountebank began to love her. She no longer had any feeling, any desire for those two lovers whom a fillip from her rosy fingers could bend to her will. It was time to go to the next chapter and to seek for fresh pleasures elsewhere.

"Listen to me," she said to the champion shot the next night, "I would rather not hide anything from you. I like your comrade; I have given myself to him and I do not want to have anything more to do with you."

"My comrade!" he repeated.

"Well, what then? The change amuses me!"

He uttered a furious cry and rushed at Regina with clenched fists. She thought he was going to kill her and closed her eyes, but he had not the courage to hurt that delicate body which he had so often covered with caresses, and in despair and hanging his head, he said hoarsely:

"Very well, we shall not meet again, since it is your wish."

The house at the Eden Réunion was as full as an overfilled basket. The violins were playing a soft and delightful waltz of Gungl's, which the reports of a revolver accentuated.

The Montefiores were standing opposite to one another, as in Chéret's picture, and about a dozen yards apart. An electric light was thrown on the younger, who was leaning against a large white target, and very slowly the other traced his living outline with bullet after bullet. He aimed with prodigious skill, and the black dots showed on the cardboard and marked the shape of his body. The applause drowned the orchestra and increased continually, when suddenly a shrill cry of horror resounded from one end of the hall to the other. The women fainted; the violins stopped, and the spectators jostled each other. At the ninth ball the younger brother had fallen to the ground,

an inert mass, with a gaping wound in his forehead. His brother did not move, and there was a look of madness on his face, while the Countess de Villégby leaned on the ledge of her box and fanned herself calmly, as implacably as any cruel goddess of ancient mythology.

The next day between four and five, when she was surrounded by her usual friends in her little warm Japanese drawing room, it was strange to hear in what a languid and indifferent voice she exclaimed:

"They say that an accident happened to one of those famous clowns, the Monta—the Monte—what is the name, Tom?"

"The Montefiores, madame!"

And then they began to talk about Angèle Velours, who was going to buy the former Folies at the Hôtel Drouot before marrying Prince Storbeck.

UGLY

CERTAINLY at this blessed epoch of the equality of mediocrity, of rectangular abomination, as Edgar Allan Poe says—at this delightful period when everybody dreams of resembling everybody else, so that it has become impossible to tell the president of the Republic from a waiter—in these days which are the forerunners of that promising, blissful day when everything in this world will be of a dull, neutral uniformity, certainly at such an epoch one has the right, or rather it is one's duty, to be ugly.

Lebeau, however, assuredly exercised that right with the most cruel vigor. He fulfilled that duty with the fiercest heroism, and to make matters worse the mysterious irony of fate had caused him to be born with the name of Lebeau, while an ingenious godfather, the unconscious accomplice of the pranks of destiny, had given him the Christian name of Antinous.¹

Even among our contemporaries, who were already on the highroad to the coming ideal of universal hideousness, Antinous Lebeau was remarkable for his ugliness; and one might have said that he positively threw zeal, too much zeal, into the matter, though he was not hideous like Mirabeau, who made people exclaim, "Oh! the beautiful monster!"

Alas! No. He was without any beauty of ugliness. He was ugly, that was all, nothing more nor less; in short, he was uglily ugly. He was not

¹ A youth of extraordinary beauty, page to the Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) and the object of his extravagant affection. He was drowned in the Nile, whether by accident or in order to escape from the life he was leading is uncertain.

humpbacked nor knock-kneed nor potbellied; his legs were not like a pair of tongs, and his arms were neither too long nor too short, and yet there was an utter lack of uniformity about him, not only in painters' eyes but also in everybody's, for nobody could meet him in the street without turning to look after him and thinking: "Good heavens! what an object."

His hair was of no particular color, a light chestnut mixed with yellow. There was not much of it; still he was not absolutely bald but just bald enough to allow his butter-colored pate to show. Butter-colored? Hardly! The color of margarine would be more applicable, and such pale margarine!

His face was also like margarine, but of adulterated margarine, certainly. His cranium, the color of unadulterated margarine, looked almost like butter in comparison.

There was very little to say about his mouth! Less than little; the sum total was—nothing. It was a chimerical mouth.

But take it that I have said nothing about him, and let us replace this vain description by the useful formula: "Impossible to describe." But you must not forget that Antinous Lebeau was ugly, that the fact impressed everybody as soon as they saw him and that nobody remembered ever having seen an uglier person; and let us add, as the climax of his misfortune, that he thought so himself.

From this you will see that he was not a fool and not ill-natured either, but of course he was unhappy. An unhappy man thinks only of his wretchedness, and people take his nightcap for a fool's cap; while, on the other hand, goodness is only esteemed when it is cheerful. Consequently Antinous Lebeau passed for a fool and an ill-tempered fool; he was not even pitied because he was so ugly!

He had only one pleasure in life, and that was to go and roam about the darkest streets on dark nights and to hear the streetwalkers say:

"Come home with me, you handsome dark man!"

It was, alas! a furtive pleasure, and he knew that it was not true. For occasionally, when the woman was old or drunk and he profited by the invitation, as soon as the candle was lighted in the garret they no longer murmured the fallacious "handsome dark man." When they saw him the old women grew still older and the drunken women got sober. And more than one, although hardened against disgust and ready for all risks, said to him, in spite of liberal payment:

"My little man, I must say you are most confoundedly ugly."

At last, however, he renounced even that lamentable pleasure when he heard the still more lamentable words which a wretched woman could not help uttering when he went home with her:

"Well, I must have been very hungry!"

Alas! It was he who was hungry, unhappy man; hungry for something that should resemble love, were it ever so little; he longed not to live like a pariah any more, not to be exiled and proscribed by his ugliness. And the ugliest, the most repugnant woman would have appeared beautiful to him if she would only not think him ugly or, at any rate, not tell him so and not let him see that she felt horror at him on that account.

The consequence was that when he one day met a poor blear-eyed creature, with her face covered with scabs and bearing evident signs of alcoholism, with a driveling mouth and ragged and filthy petticoats, to whom he gave liberal alms for which she kissed his hand, he took her home with him, had her cleansed, dressed and taken care of, made her his servant and then his housekeeper. Next he raised her to the rank of his mistress, and finally, of course, he married her.

She was almost as ugly as he was! Almost, but certainly not quite; for she was hideous, and her hideousness had its charm and its beauty, no doubt; that something by which a woman can attract a man. And she had proved that by deceiving him, and she let him see it better still by seducing another man.

That other man was actually uglier than he was.

He was certainly uglier, a collection of every physical and moral ugliness, a companion of beggars whom she had picked up among her former vagrant associates, a jailbird, a dealer in little girls, a vagabond covered with filth, with legs like a toad's, with a mouth like a lamprey's and a death's-head in which the nose had been replaced by two holes.

"And you have wronged me with a wretch like that," the poor cuckold said. "And in my own house! And in such a manner that I might catch you in the very act! And why, why, you wretch? Why, seeing that he is uglier than I am?"

"Oh no!" she exclaimed. "You may say what you like, that I am a dirty slut and a strumpet, but do not say that he is uglier than you are."

And the unhappy men stood there, vanquished and overcome by her last words, which she uttered without understanding all the horror which he would feel at them.

"Because, you see, he has his own particular ugliness, while you are merely ugly like everybody else is."

THE DEBT

"Pst! Pst! Come with me, you handsome dark fellow. I am very nice, as you will see. Do come up. At any rate you will be able to warm yourself, for I have a capital fire at home."

But nothing enticed the foot passengers, neither being called a handsome dark fellow, which she applied quite impartially to old or fat men also, nor the promise of pleasure which was emphasized by a caressing ogle and smile, nor even the promise of a good fire, which was so attractive in the bitter December wind. And tall Fanny continued her useless walk, and the night advanced and foot passengers grew scarcer. In another hour the streets would be absolutely deserted, and unless she could manage to pick up some belated drunken man she would be obliged to return home alone.

And yet tall Fanny was a beautiful woman! With the head of a bacchante and the body of a goddess, in all the full splendor of her twenty-three years, she deserved something better than this miserable pavement, where she could not even pick up the five francs which she wanted for the requirements of the next day. But there! In this infernal Paris, in this swarming crowd of competitors who all jostled each other, courtesans, like artists, did not attain to eminence until their later years. In that they resembled precious stones, as the most valuable of them are those that have been set the oftenest.

And that was why tall Fanny, who was later to become one of the richest and most brilliant stars of Parisian gallantry, was walking about the streets on this bitter December night without a halfpenny in her pocket, in spite of the head of a bacchante and the body of a goddess and in all the full splendor of her twenty-three years.

However, it was too late now to hope to meet anybody; there was not a single foot passenger about; the street was decidedly empty, dull and lifeless. Nothing was to be heard except the whistling of sudden gusts of wind, and nothing was to be seen except the flickering gaslights, which looked like dying butterflies. Well! The only thing was to return home alone.

But suddenly tall Fanny saw a human form standing on the pavement at the next crossing. It seemed to be hesitating and uncertain which way to go. The figure, which was very small and slight, was wrapped in a long cloak which reached almost to the ground.

"Perhaps he is a hunchback," the girl said to herself. "They like tall women!" And she walked quickly toward him, from habit already saying: "Pst! Pst! Come home with me, you handsome dark fellow!"

What luck! The man did not go away but came toward Fanny, although somewhat timidly, while she went to meet him, repeating her wheedling words so as to reassure him. She went all the quicker as she saw that he was staggering with the zigzag walk of a drunken man, and she thought to herself: "When once they sit down there is no possibility of getting these beggars up again, for they want to go to sleep just where they are. I only hope I shall get to him before he tumbles down."

Luckily she reached him just in time to catch him in her arms, but as soon as she had done so she almost let him fall in her astonishment. It was neither a drunken man nor a hunchback, but a child of twelve or thirteen in an overcoat, who was crying and who said in a weak voice: "I beg your pardon, madame, I beg your pardon. If you only knew how hungry and cold I am! I beg your pardon! Oh! I am so cold."

"Poor child!" she said, putting her arms around him and kissing him. And she carried him off with a full but happy heart, and while he continued to sob she said to him mechanically: "Don't be frightened, my little man. You will see how nice I can be! And then you can warm yourself; I have a capital fire."

But the fire was out; the room, however, was warm, and the child said as soon as they got in: "Oh! How comfortable it is here! It is a great deal better than in the streets, I can tell you! And I have been living in the streets for six days." He began to cry again and added: "I beg your pardon, madame. I have eaten nothing for two days."

Tall Fanny opened her cupboard which had glass doors. The middle shelf held all her linen, and on the upper one there was a box of Albert biscuits, a drop of brandy at the bottom of a bottle and a few small lumps of sugar in a cup. With that and some water out of a jug she concocted a sort of broth, which he swallowed ravenously, and when he had done he wished to tell his story, which he did, yawning all the time.

His grandfather (the only one of his relatives whom he had ever known), who had been a painter and decorator at Soisson, had died about a month before, but before his death he had said to him:

"When I am gone, little man, you will find a letter to my brother, who is in business in Paris, among my papers. You must take it to him, and he will be certain to take care of you. However, in any case you must go to Paris, for you have an aptitude for painting, and only there can you hope to become an artist."

When the old man was dead (he died in the hospital) the child started, dressed in an old coat of his grandfather's and with thirty francs, which was all that the old man had left behind him, in his

pocket. But when he got to Paris there was nobody of the name at the address mentioned on the letter. The dead man's brother had left there six months before; nobody knew where he had gone to, and so the child was alone. For a few days he managed to exist on what he had over after paying for his journey. After he had spent his last franc he had wandered about the streets, as he had no money with which to pay for a bed, buying his bread by the halfpennyworth until for the last forty-eight hours he had been without anything, absolutely without anything.

He told her all this while he was half asleep, amid sobs and yawns, so that the girl did not venture to ask him any more questions, in spite of her curiosity, but on the contrary cut him short and undressed him while she listened and only interrupted him to kiss him and to say to him: "There, there, my poor child! You shall tell me the rest tomorrow. You cannot go on now, so go to bed and have a good sleep." And as soon as he had finished she put him to bed, where he immediately fell into a profound sleep. Then she undressed herself quickly, got into bed by his side so that she might keep him warm and went to sleep, crying to herself without exactly knowing why.

The next day they breakfasted and dined together at a common eating house on money that she had borrowed, and when it was dark she said to the child: "Wait for me here; I will come for you at closing time." She came back sooner, however, about ten o'clock. She had twelve francs which she gave him, telling him that she had *earned them*, and she continued with a laugh: "I feel that I shall make some more. I am in luck this evening, and you have brought it me. Do not be impatient, but have some milk posset while you are waiting for me."

She kissed him, and the kind girl felt real maternal happiness as she went out. An hour later, however, she was arrested by the police for having been found in a prohibited place, and off she went, food for St. Lazare.¹

And the child, who was turned out by the proprietor at closing time and then driven from the furnished lodgings the next morning, where they told him that *tall Fanny was in jail*, began his wretched vagabond life in the streets again with only the twelve francs to depend on.

. . .

Fifteen years afterward the newspapers announced one morning that the famous Fanny Clariet, the celebrated "horizontal" whose caprices had caused a revolution in high life, that queen of frail beauties for whom three men had committed suicide and so many others had ruined themselves, that incomparable living statue who had attracted

¹ A prison in Paris.

all Paris to the theater where she impersonated Venus in her transparent skin tights made of woven air and a knitted nothing, had been shut up in a lunatic asylum. She had been seized suddenly; it was an attack of general paralysis, and as her debts were enormous, when her estate had been liquidated she would have to end her days at La Salpêtrière.

"No, certainly not!" François Guerland, the painter, said to himself when he read the notice of it in the papers. "No, the great Fanny shall certainly not end like that." For it was certainly she; there could be no doubt about it. For a long time after she had shown him that act of charity which he could never forget, the child had tried to see his benefactress again. But Paris is a very mysterious place, and he himself had had many adventures before he grew up to be a man and, eventually, almost somebody! But he only found her in the distance; he had recognized her at the theater, on the stage, or as she was getting into her carriage which was fit for a princess. And how could he approach her then? Could he remind her of the time when her price was five francs? No, assuredly not, and so he had followed her, thanked her and blessed her from a distance.

But now the time had come for him to pay his debt and he paid it. Although tolerably well known as a painter with a future in store for him, he was not rich. But what did that matter? He mortgaged that future which people prophesied for him and gave himself over, hand and foot, to a picture dealer. Then he had the poor woman taken to an excellent asylum where she could have not only every care, but every necessary comfort and even luxury. Alas, however, general paralysis never forgives. Sometimes it releases its prey, like the cruel cat releases the mouse, for a brief moment, only to lay hold of it again later, more fiercely than ever. Fanny had that period of abatement in her symptoms, and one morning the physician was able to say to the young man: "You are anxious to remove her? Very well! But you will soon have to bring her back, for the cure is only apparent, and her present state will only endure for a month at most, and then only if the patient is kept free from every excitement and excess!"

"And without that precaution?" Guerland asked him.

"Then," the doctor replied, "the final crisis will be all the nearer; that is all. But whether it would be nearer or more remote, it will not be the less fatal."

"You are sure of that?"

"Absolutely sure."

François Guerland took tall Fanny out of the asylum, installed her in splendid apartments and went to live with her there. She had grown old, bloated, with white hair and sometimes wandered in her mind,

and she did not recognize in him the poor little lad on whom she had taken pity in the days gone by, nor did he remind her of the circumstances. He allowed her to believe that she was adored by a rich young man who was passionately devoted to her. He was young, ardent and caressing. Never had a mistress such a lover, and for three weeks before she relapsed into the horrors of madness, which were happily soon terminated by her death, she intoxicated herself with the ecstasy of his kisses and thus bade farewell to conscient life in an apotheosis of love.

The other day at dessert after an artists' dinner, they were speaking of François Guerland, whose last picture at the Salon had been so deservedly praised.

"Ah yes!" one of them said with a contemptuous voice and look. "That handsome fellow Guerland!"

And another, accentuating the insinuation, added boldly: "Yes, that is exactly it! That handsome, too handsome fellow Guerland, the man who allows himself to be kept by women."

THE FATHER

AS HE LIVED at Batignolles and was a clerk in the Public Education Office, he took the omnibus every morning to the center of Paris, sitting opposite a girl with whom he fell in love.

She went to the shop where she was employed at the same time every day. She was a little brunette, one of those dark girls whose eyes are so dark they look like spots and whose complexion has a look like ivory. He always saw her coming at the corner of the same street. She generally ran to catch the heavy vehicle and would spring upon the steps before the horses had quite stopped. Then getting inside rather out of breath and sitting down, she would look round her.

The first time that he saw her François Tessier felt that her face pleased him extremely. One sometimes meets a woman whom one longs to clasp madly in one's arms immediately without even knowing her. That girl answered to his inward desires, to his secret hopes, to that sort of ideal of love which one cherishes in the depths of the heart without knowing it.

He looked at her intently, in spite of himself, and she grew embarrassed at his looks and blushed. He saw it and tried to turn away his eyes, but he involuntarily fixed them upon her again every moment,

although he tried to look in another direction, and in a few days they knew each other without having spoken. He gave up his place to her when the omnibus was full and got outside, though he was very sorry to do it. By this time she had gone so far as to greet him with a little smile, and although she always dropped her eyes under his looks, which she felt were too ardent, yet she did not appear offended at being looked at in such a manner.

They ended by speaking. A kind of rapid intimacy had become established between them, a daily intimacy of half an hour, which was certainly one of the most charming half-hours in his life to him. He thought of her all the rest of the time, saw her continually during the long office hours, for he was haunted and bewitched by that floating and yet tenacious recollection which the image of a beloved woman leaves in us, and it seemed to him that the entire possession of that little person would be maddening happiness to him, almost above human realization.

Every morning now she shook hands with him, and he preserved the feeling of that touch and the recollection of the gentle pressure of her little fingers until the next day. He almost fancied that he preserved the imprint of it on his skin, and he anxiously waited for this short omnibus ride all the rest of the time, while Sundays seemed to him heartbreaking days. However, there was no doubt that she loved him, for one Sunday in spring she promised to go and lunch with him at Maison-Lafitte the next day.

II

She was at the railway station first, which surprised him, but she said: "Before going I want to speak to you. We have twenty minutes, and that is more than I shall take for what I have to say."

She trembled as she hung on his arm and looked down, while her cheeks were pale, but she continued: "I do not want you to be deceived in me, and I shall not go there with you unless you promise, unless you swear—not to do—not to do anything that is at all improper."

She had suddenly become as red as a poppy and said no more. He did not know what to reply, for he was happy and disappointed at the same time. At the bottom of his heart he perhaps preferred that it should be so, and yet during the night he had indulged in anticipations that sent the hot blood flowing through his veins. He should love her less, certainly, if he knew that her conduct was light, but then it would be so charming, so delicious for him! And he made all a man's usual selfish calculations in love affairs.

As he did not say anything she began to speak again in an agitated voice and with tears in her eyes: "If you do not promise to respect me altogether I shall return home."

And so he squeezed her arm tenderly and replied: "I promise you shall only do what you like." She appeared relieved in mind and asked with a smile: "Do you really mean it?"

And he looked into her eyes and replied, "I swear it."

"Now you may take the tickets," she said.

During the journey they could hardly speak, as the carriage was full, and when they got to Maison-Lafitte they went toward the Seine. The sun, which shone full upon the river, upon the leaves and upon the turf, seemed to reflect in them his brightness, and they went hand in hand along the bank, looking at the shoals of little fish swimming near the bank, brimming over with happiness, as if they were raised from earth in their lightness of heart.

At last she said: "How foolish you must think me!"

"Why?" he asked.

"To come out like this all alone with you."

"Certainly not; it is quite natural."

"No, no, it is not natural for me—because I do not wish to commit a fault, and yet this is how girls fall. But if you only knew how wretched it is, every day the same thing, every day in the month and every month in the year. I live quite alone with Mamma, and as she has had a great deal of trouble, she is not very cheerful. I do the best I can and try to laugh in spite of everything, but I do not always succeed. But all the same it was wrong in me to come, though you, at any rate, will not be sorry."

By the way of an answer he kissed her ardently on the ear that was nearest him, but she started away from him with an abrupt movement and, getting suddenly angry, exclaimed: "Oh! Monsieur François, after what you swore to me!" And they went back to Maison-Lafitte.

They had lunch at the Petit-Havre, a low house buried under four enormous poplar trees by the side of the river. The air, the heat, the small bottle of white wine and the sensation of being so close together made them red and silent with a feeling of oppression, but after the coffee they regained their high spirits and, having crossed the Seine, started off along the bank toward the village of La Frette. Suddenly he asked: "What is your name?"

"Louise."

"Louise," he repeated and said nothing more.

The river, which described a long curve, bathed a row of white houses in the distance which were reflected in the water. The girl picked the daisies and made them into a great bunch, while he sang

vigorously, as intoxicated as a colt that has been turned into a meadow. On their left a vine-covered slope followed the river. Suddenly François stopped motionless with astonishment: "Oh! Look there!" he said.

The vines had come to an end, and the whole slope was covered with lilac bushes in flower. It was a violet-colored wood! A kind of great carpet stretched over the earth, reaching as far as the village, more than two miles off. She also stood surprised and delighted and murmured: "Oh! How pretty!" And, crossing a meadow, they walked toward that curious low hill which every year furnishes all the lilac which is sold through Paris on the carts of the flower peddlers.

A narrow path went beneath the trees, so they took it, and when they came to a small clearing they sat down.

Swarms of flies were buzzing around them and making a continuous, gentle sound, and the sun, the bright sun of a perfectly still day, shone over the bright slopes, and from that wood of flowers a powerful aroma was borne toward them, a wave of perfume, the breath of the flowers.

A church clock struck in the distance. They embraced gently, then clasped each other close, lying on the grass without the knowledge of anything except of that kiss. She had closed her eyes and held him in her arms, pressing him to her closely without a thought, with her reason bewildered and from head to foot in passionate expectation. And she surrendered herself altogether without knowing that she had given herself to him. But she soon came to herself with the feeling of a great misfortune, and she began to cry and sob with grief, with her face buried in her hands.

He tried to console her, but she wanted to start, to return and go home immediately, and she kept saying as she walked along quickly: "Good heavens! Good heavens!"

He said to her: "Louise! Louise! Please let us stop here." But now her cheeks were red and her eyes hollow, and as soon as they got to the railway station in Paris she left him without even saying good-by.

III

When he met her in the omnibus next day she appeared to him to be changed and thinner, and she said to him: "I want to speak to you; we will get down at the boulevard."

As soon as they were on the pavement she said: "We must bid each other good-by; I cannot meet you again after what has happened."

"But why?" he asked.

"Because I cannot; I have been culpable and I will not be so again."

Then he implored her, tortured by desire, maddened by the wish

of having her entirely in the absolute freedom of nights of love, but she replied firmly: "No, I cannot; I cannot."

He, however, only grew all the more excited and promised to marry her, but she said: "No," and left him.

For over a week he did not see her. He could not manage to meet her, and as he did not know her address he thought he had lost her altogether. On the ninth day, however, there was a ring at his bell, and when he opened it she was there. She threw herself into his arms and did not resist any longer, and for three months she was his mistress. He was beginning to grow tired of her, when she told him a woman's most precious secret, and then he had one idea and wish—to break with her at any price. As, however, he could not do that, not knowing how to begin or what to say, full of anxiety, he took a decisive step. One night he changed his lodgings and disappeared.

The blow was so heavy that she did not look for the man who had abandoned her but threw herself at her mother's knees, confessed her misfortune and some months after gave birth to a boy.

IV

Years passed, and François Tessier grew old without there having been any alteration in his life. He led the dull, monotonous life of bureaucrats, without hopes and without expectations. Every day he got up at the same time, went through the same streets, went through the same door, past the same porter, went into the same office, sat in the same chair and did the same work. He was alone in the world, alone during the day in the midst of his different colleagues, and alone at night in his bachelor's lodgings, and he laid by a hundred francs a month against old age.

Every Sunday he went to the Champs Elysées to watch the elegant people, the carriages and the pretty women, and the next day he used to say to one of his colleagues: "The return of the carriages from the Bois de Boulogne was very brilliant yesterday." One fine Sunday morning, however, he went into the Parc Monceau where the mothers and nurses, sitting on the sides of the walks, watched the children playing, and suddenly François Tessier started. A woman passed by holding two children by the hand: a little boy of about ten and a little girl of four. It was she.

He walked another hundred yards and then fell into a chair, choking with emotion. She had not recognized him, and so he came back, wishing to see her again. She was sitting down now, and the boy was standing by her side very quietly, while the little girl was making sand castles. It was she; it was certainly she, but she had the serious looks

of a lady, was dressed simply and looked self-possessed and dignified. He looked at her from a distance, for he did not venture to go near, but the little boy raised his head, and François Tessier felt himself tremble. It was his own son; there could be no doubt of that. And as he looked at him he thought he could recognize himself as he appeared in an old photograph taken years ago. He remained hidden behind a tree, waiting for her to go, that he might follow her.

He did not sleep that night. The idea of the child especially harassed him. His son! Oh! If he could only have known, have been sure. But what could he have done? However, he went to the house where she had once lived and asked about her. He was told that a neighbor, an honorable man of strict morals, had been touched by her distress and had married her; he knew the fault she had committed and had married her and had even recognized the child, his, François Tessier's child, as his own.

He returned to the Parc Monceau every Sunday, for then he always saw her, and each time he was seized with a mad, an irresistible longing to take his son into his arms, cover him with kisses and to steal him, to carry him off.

He suffered horribly in his wretched isolation as an old bachelor with nobody to care for him, and he also suffered atrocious mental torture, torn by paternal tenderness springing from remorse, longing and jealousy and from that need of loving one's own children which nature has implanted in all. And so at last he determined to make a despairing attempt and, going up to her as she entered the park, he said, standing in the middle of the path, pale and with trembling lips: "You do not recognize me?" She raised her eyes, looked at him, uttered an exclamation of horror, of terror and, taking the two children by the hand, she rushed away, dragging them after her, while he went home and wept inconsolably.

Months passed without his seeing her again. He suffered day and night, for he was a prey to his paternal love. He would gladly have died if he could only have kissed his son; he would have committed murder, performed any task, braved any danger, ventured anything. He wrote to her, but she did not reply, and after writing her some twenty letters he saw that there was no hope of altering her determination. Then he formed the desperate resolution of writing to her husband, being quite prepared to receive a bullet from a revolver if need be. His letter only consisted of a few lines, as follows:

MONSIEUR:

You must have a perfect horror of my name, but I am so miserable, so overcome by misery, that my only hope is in you, and

therefore I venture to request you to grant me an interview of only five minutes.

I have the honor, etc.

The next day he received the reply:

MONSIEUR:

I shall expect you tomorrow, Tuesday, at five o'clock.

V

As he went up the staircase François Tessier's heart beat so violently that he had to stop several times. There was a dull and violent noise in his breast, the noise as of some animal galloping; he could only breathe with difficulty and had to hold onto the banisters in order not to fall.

He rang the bell on the third floor, and when a maidservant had opened the door he asked: "Does Monsieur Flamel live here?"

"Yes, monsieur. Kindly come in."

He was shown into the drawing room; he was alone and waited, feeling bewildered, as in the midst of a catastrophe, until a door opened and a man came in. He was tall, serious and rather stout; he wore a black frock coat and pointed to a chair with his hand. François Tessier sat down and said, panting: "Monsieur—monsieur—I do not know whether you know my name—whether you know——"

M. Flamel interrupted him: "You need not tell it me, monsieur; I know it. My wife has spoken to me about you."

He spoke it in the dignified tone of voice of a good man who wishes to be severe, with the commonplace stateliness of an honorable man, and François Tessier continued: "Well, monsieur, I want to say this. I am dying of grief, of remorse, of shame, and I would like once, only once, to kiss the child."

M. Flamel rose and rang the bell, and when the servant came in he said: "Will you bring Louis here?" When she had gone out they remained face to face without speaking, having nothing more to say to one another, and waited. Then suddenly a little boy of ten rushed into the room and ran up to the man whom he believed to be his father, but he stopped when he saw a stranger, and M. Flamel kissed him and said: "Now go and kiss that gentleman, my dear." And the child went up to Tessier nicely and looked at him.

François Tessier had risen; he let his hat fall and was ready to fall himself as he looked at his son, while M. Flamel had turned away, from a feeling of delicacy, and was looking out of the window.

The child waited in surprise, but he picked up the hat and gave it to the stranger. Then François, taking the child up in his arms, began

to kiss him wildly all over his face, on his eyes, his cheeks, on his mouth, on his hair, and the youngster, frightened at the shower of kisses, tried to avoid them, turned away his head and pushed away the man's face with his little hands. But suddenly François Tessier put him down, cried: "Good-by! Good-by!" and rushed out of the room as if he had been a thief.

THE ARTIST

"BAH! MONSIEUR," the old mountebank said to me; "it is a matter of exercise and habit, that is all! Of course one requires to be a little gifted that way and not to be butter-fingered, but what is chiefly necessary is patience and daily practice for long, long years."

His modesty surprised me all the more, because of all performers who are generally infatuated with their own skill he was the most wonderfully clever one I had met. Certainly I had frequently seen him, for everybody had seen him in some circus or other, or even in traveling shows, performing the trick that consists of putting a man or woman with extended arms against a wooden target and in throwing knives between their fingers and round their heads from a distance. There is nothing very extraordinary in it, after all, when one knows *the tricks of the trade* and that the knives are not the least sharp and stick into the wood at some distance from the flesh. It is the rapidity of the throws, the glitter of the blades and the curve which the handles make toward their living object which give an air of danger to an exhibition that has become commonplace and only requires very middling skill.

But here there was no trick and no deception and no dust thrown into the eyes. It was done in good earnest and in all sincerity. The knives were as sharp as razors, and the old mountebank planted them close to the flesh, exactly in the angle between the fingers. He surrounded the head with a perfect halo of knives and the neck with a collar from which nobody could have extricated himself without cutting his carotid artery; while, to increase the difficulty, the old fellow went through the performance without seeing, his whole face being covered with a close mask of thick oilcloth.

Naturally, like other great artists, he was not understood by the crowd, who confounded him with vulgar tricksters, and his mask only appeared to them a trick the more, and a very common trick into the bargain.

"He must think us very stupid," they said. "How could he possibly aim without having his eyes open?"

And they thought there must be imperceptible holes in the oilcloth, a sort of latticework concealed in the material. It was useless for him to allow the public to examine the mask for themselves before the exhibition began. It was all very well that they could not discover any trick, but they were only all the more convinced that they were being tricked. Did not the people know that they ought to be tricked?

I had recognized a great artist in the old mountebank, and I was quite sure that he was altogether incapable of any trickery. I had told him so while expressing my admiration to him, and he had been touched by my open admiration and above all by the justice I had done him. Thus we became good friends, and he explained to me, very modestly, the real trick which the crowd does not understand, the eternal trick contained in these simple words: "To be gifted by nature and to practice every day for long, long years."

He had been especially struck by the certainty which I expressed that any trickery must become impossible to him. "Yes," he said to me, "quite impossible! Impossible to a degree which you cannot imagine. If I were to tell you! But where would be the use?"

His face clouded over, and his eyes filled with tears. I did not venture to force myself into his confidence. My looks, however, were not so discreet as my silence and begged him to speak, so he responded to their mute appeal.

"After all," he said, "why should I not tell you about it? You will understand me." And he added, with a look of sudden ferocity: "She understood it, at any rate!"

"Who?" I asked.

"My strumpet of a wife," he replied. "Ah! monsieur, what an abominable creature she was—if you only knew! Yes, she understood it too well, too well, and that is why I hate her so; even more on that account than for having deceived me. For that is a natural fault, is it not, and may be pardoned? But the other thing was a crime, a horrible crime."

The woman who stood against the wooden target every night with her arms stretched out and her fingers extended, and whom the old mountebank fitted with gloves and with a halo formed of his knives, which were as sharp as razors and which he planted close to her, was his wife. She might have been a woman of forty and must have been fairly pretty, but with a perverse prettiness; she had an impudent mouth, a mouth that was at the same time sensual and bad, with the lower lip too thick for the thin, dry upper lip.

I had several times noticed that every time he planted a knife in the board she uttered a laugh, so low as scarcely to be heard, but which

was very significant when one heard it, for it was a hard and very mocking laugh. I had always attributed that sort of reply to an artifice which the occasion required. It was intended, I thought, to accentuate the danger she incurred and the contempt that she felt for it, thanks to the sureness of the thrower's hands, and so I was very much surprised when the mountebank said to me:

"Have you observed her laugh, I say? Her evil laugh which makes fun of me and her cowardly laugh which defies me? Yes, cowardly, because she knows that nothing can happen to her, nothing, in spite of all she deserves, in spite of all that I ought to do to her, in spite of all that I *want* to do to her."

"What do you want to do?"

"Confound it! Cannot you guess? I want to kill her."

"To kill her, because she has——"

"Because she has deceived me? No, no, not that, I tell you again. I have forgiven her for that a long time ago, and I am too much accustomed to it! But the worst of it is that the first time I forgave her, when I told her that all the same I might someday have my revenge by cutting her throat, if I chose, without seeming to do it on purpose, as if it were an accident, mere awkwardness——"

"Oh! So you said that to her?"

"Of course I did, and I meant it. I thought I might be able to do it, for you see I had the perfect right to do so. It was so simple, so easy, so tempting! Just think! A mistake of less than half an inch, and her skin would be cut at the neck where the jugular vein is, and the jugular would be severed. My knives cut very well! And when once the jugular is cut—good-by. The blood would spurt out, and one, two, three red jets, and all would be over; she would be dead, and I should have had my revenge!"

"That is true, certainly, horribly true!"

"And without any risk to me, eh? An accident, that is all; bad luck, one of those mistakes which happen every day in our business. What could they accuse me of? Whoever would think of accusing me even? Homicide through imprudence, that would be all! They would even pity me rather than accuse me. 'My wife! My poor wife!' I should say, sobbing. 'My wife, who is so necessary to me, who is half the breadwinner, who takes part in my performance! You must acknowledge that I should be pitied!'"

"Certainly, there is not the least doubt about that."

"And you must allow that such a revenge would be a very nice revenge, the best possible revenge which I could have with assured impunity."

"Evidently that is so."

"Very well! But when I told her so, as I have told you, and more forcibly still, threatening her, as I was mad with rage and ready to do the deed that I had dreamed of on the spot, what do you think she said?"

"That you were a good fellow and would certainly not have the atrocious courage to——"

"Tut! tut! tut! I am not such a good fellow as you think. I am not frightened of blood, and that I have proved already, though it would be useless to tell you how and where. But I had no necessity to prove it to her, for she knows that I am capable of a good many things, even of crime; especially of one crime."

"And she was not frightened?"

"No. She merely replied that I could not do what I said; you understand. That I could not do it!"

"Why not?"

"Ah! monsieur, so you do not understand? Why do you not? Have I not explained to you by what constant, long, daily practice I have learned to plant my knives without seeing what I am doing?"

"Yes; well, what then?"

"Well! Cannot you understand what she has understood with such terrible results, that now my hand would no longer obey me if I wished to make a mistake as I threw?"

"Is it possible?"

"Nothing is truer, I am sorry to say. For I really have wished to have the revenge which I have dreamed of and which I thought so easy. Exasperated by that bad woman's insolence and confidence in her own safety, I have several times made up my mind to kill her and have exerted all my energy and all my skill to make my knives fly aside when I threw them to make a border round her neck. I have tried with all my might to make them deviate half an inch, just enough to cut her throat. I wanted to, and I have never succeeded, never. And always the slut's horrible laugh makes fun of me, always, always."

And with a deluge of tears, with something like a roar of unsatiated and muzzled rage, he ground his teeth as he wound up: "She knows me, the jade; she is in the secret of my work, of my patience, of my trick, routine, whatever you may call it! She lives in my innermost being and sees into it more closely than you do or than I do myself. She knows what a faultiness machine I have become, the machine of which she makes fun, the machine which is too well wound up, the machine which cannot get out of order—and she knows that I *cannot* make a mistake."

FALSE ALARM

"I HAVE A PERFECT HORROR of pianos," said Frémecourt, "of those hateful boxes which fill up a drawing room and have not even the soft sound and the queer shape of the mahogany or veneered spinets to which our grandmothers sighed out exquisite, long-forgotten ballads, allowing their fingers to run over the keys, while around them there floated a delicate odor of powder and muslin, and some little abbé or other turned over the leaves, continually making mistakes as he looked at the patches close to the lips on the white skin of the player instead of at the music. I wish there were a tax upon them, or that some evening during a riot the people would make huge bonfires of them which would illuminate the whole town. They simply exasperate me and affect my nerves and make me think of the tortures those poor girls must suffer who are condemned not to stir for hours but to keep on constantly strumming away at the chromatic scales and monotonous arpeggios and to have no other object in life except to win a prize at the conservatoire.

"Their incoherent music suggests to me the sufferings of those who are ill, abandoned, wounded. It proceeds from every floor of every house; it irritates you, nearly drives you mad and makes you break out into ironical fits of laughter.

"And yet when that madcap Lâlie Spring honored me with her love—I never can refuse anything to a woman who smells of rare perfume and who has a large store of promises in her looks and who puts out her red, smiling lips immediately, as if she were going to offer you hansel money—I bought a piano so that she might strum upon it to her heart's content. I got it, however, on the hire-purchase system and paid so much a month, as *grisettes*¹ do for their furniture.

"At that time I had the apartments I had so long dreamed of: warm, elegant, light, well arranged, with two entrances and an incomparable porter's wife who had been canteen keeper in a Zouave regiment and knew everything and understood everything at a wink.

"It was the kind of apartment from which a woman has not the courage to escape so as to avoid temptation, where she becomes weak and rolls herself up on the soft eider-down cushions like a cat, where she is appeased and, in spite of herself, thinks of love at the sight of the low, wide couch, so suitable for caresses, rooms with heavy curtains which quite deaden the sound of voices and of laughter and

¹ Workgirl, a name applied to those whose virtue is not too rigorous.

filled with flowers that scent the air, whose smell lingers on the folds of the hangings.

"They were rooms in which a woman forgets time, where she begins by accepting a cup of tea and nibbling a sweet cake and abandons her fingers timidly and with regret to other fingers which tremble and are hot and so by degrees loses her head and succumbs.

"I do not know whether the piano brought us ill luck, but Lâlie had not even time to learn four songs before she disappeared like the wind, just as she had come—*flick-flack*, good night, good-by. Perhaps it was from spite, because she had found letters from other women on my table; perhaps to change her companion, as she was not one of those to hang onto one man and become a fixture.

"I had not been in love with her, certainly, but yet such breakings have always some effect on a man. Some string breaks when a woman leaves you, and you think that you must start all over again and take another chance in that forbidden sport in which one risks so much, the sport that one has been through a hundred times before and which leaves you nothing to show in the end.

"Nothing is more unpleasant than to lend your apartments to a friend, to realize that someone is going to disturb the mysterious intimacy which really exists between the actual owner and his fortune and violate the soul of those past kisses which float in the air; that the room whose tints you connect with some recollection, some dream, some sweet vision, and whose colors you have tried to make harmonize with certain fair-haired, pink-skinned girls, is going to become a commonplace lodging, like the rooms in an ordinary lodginghouse, fit only for hidden crime and for evanescent love affairs.

"However, poor Stanis had begged me so urgently to do him that service; he was so very much in love with Madame de Fréjus. Among the characters in this comedy there was a brute of a husband who was terribly jealous and suspicious, one of those Othellos who have always a flea in their ear and come back unexpectedly from shooting or the club, who pick up pieces of torn paper, listen at doors, smell out meetings with the nose of a detective and seem to have been sent into the world only to be cuckolds, but who know better than most how to lay a snare and to play a nasty trick. So when I went to Venice I consented to let him have my rooms.

"I will leave you to guess whether they made up for lost time, although, after all, it is no business of yours. My journey, however, which was only to have lasted a few weeks—just long enough for me to benefit by the change of air, to rid my brain of the image of my last mistress and perhaps to find another among that strange mixture of society which one meets there, a medley of American, Slav, Vien-

nese and Italian women, who instill a little artificial life into that old city, asleep amid the melancholy silence of the lagoons—was prolonged, and Stanis was as much at home in my rooms as he was in his own.

"Madame Piquignolles, the retired canteen keeper, took great interest in this adventure, watched over their little love affair and, as she used to say, was on guard as soon as they arrived one after the other, the marchioness covered with a thick veil and slipping in as quickly as possible, always uneasy and afraid that Monsieur de Fréjus might be following her, and Stanis with the assured and satisfied look of an amorous husband who is going to meet his little wife after having been away from home for a few days.

"Well, one day during one of those delicious moments when his beloved one, fresh from her bath and invigorated by the coolness of the water, was pressing close to her lover, reclining in his arms and smiling at him with half-closed eyes, during one of those moments when people do not speak but continue their dream, the sentinel, without even asking leave, suddenly burst into the room, for worthy Madame Piquignolles was a terrible fright.

"A few minutes before a well-dressed gentleman, followed by two others of seedy appearance but who looked very strong and fit to knock anybody down, had questioned and cross-questioned her in a rough manner and tried to turn her inside out, as she said, asking her whether Monsieur de Frémecourt lived on the first floor, without giving her any explanation. When she declared that there was nobody occupying the apartments then, as her lodger was not in France, Monsieur de Fréjus—for it could certainly be nobody but he—had burst out into an evil laugh and said: 'Very well; I shall go and fetch the police commissary of the district, and he will make you let us in!'

"And as quickly as possible while she was telling her story, now in a low and then in a shrill voice, the woman picked up the marchioness's dress, cloak, lace-edge drawers, silk petticoat and little varnished shoes, pulled her out of bed without giving her time to let her know what she was doing or to moan or to have a fit of hysterics and carried her off, as if she had been a doll, with all her pretty toggery to a large, empty cupboard in the dining room that was concealed by Flemish tapestry. 'You are a man. Try to get out of the mess,' she said to Stanis as she shut the door; 'I will be answerable for Madame.' And the enormous woman who was out of breath by hurrying upstairs as she had done, and whose kind, large red face was dripping with perspiration while her ample bosom shook beneath her loose jacket, took Madame de Fréjus onto her knees as if she had been a baby whose nurse was trying to quiet her.

"She felt the poor little culprit's heart beating as if it were going to burst, while shivers ran over her skin which was so soft and delicate that the porter's wife was afraid that she might hurt it with her coarse hands. She was struck with wonder at the cambric chemise which a gust of wind would have carried off as if it had been a pigeon's feather and by the delicate odor of that scarce flower which filled the narrow cupboard and which rose up in the darkness from that supple body which was impregnated with the warmth of the bed.

"She would have liked to be there in that profaned room and to tell them in a loud voice—with her hands upon her hips as at the time when she used to serve brandy to her comrades at Daddy l'Arbi's—that they had no common sense, that they were none of them good for much, neither the police commissary, the husband nor the subordinates, to come and torment a pretty young thing, who was having a little bit of fun, like that. It was a nice job, to get over the wall in that way, to be absent from the second call of names, especially when they were all of the same sort and were glad of five francs an hour! She had certainly done quite right to get out sometimes and to have a sweetheart, and she was a charming little thing, and that she would say if she were called before the court as a witness.

"And she took Madame de Fréjus in her arms to quiet her and repeated the same thing a dozen times, whispered pretty things to her and interrupted her occasionally to listen whether they were not searching all the nooks and corners of the apartment. 'Come, come,' she said; 'do not distress yourself. Be calm, my dear. It hurts me to hear you cry like that. There will be no mischief done; I will vouch for it.'

"The marchioness, who was nearly fainting and who was prostrate with terror, could only sob out: 'Good heavens! Good heavens!'

"She scarcely seemed to be conscious of anything; her head seemed vacant; her ears buzzed, and she felt benumbed, like one who goes to sleep in the snow.

"Ah! Only to forget everything, as her love dream was over, to go out quickly like those little rose-colored tapers at Nice on Shrove Tuesday evening.

"Oh! Not to awake any more, as the tomorrow would come in black and sad, because a whole array of barristers, ushers, solicitors and judges would be against her and disturb her usual quietude, would torment her, cover her with mud, as her delicious, amorous adventure—her first—which had been so carefully enveloped in mystery and had been kept so secret behind closed shutters and thick veils, would become an everyday episode of adultery which would get wind and be discussed from door to door. The lilac had faded, and she was obliged

to bid farewell to happiness, as if to an old friend who was going far, very far away, never to return!

"Suddenly, however, she started and sat up with her neck stretched out and her eyes fixed, while the ex-canteen keeper, who was trembling with emotion, put her hands to her left ear, which was her best, like a speaking trumpet, and tried to hear the cries which succeeded each other from room to room amid a noise of opening and shutting of doors.

"Ah! Upon my word, I am not blind. It is Monsieur de Stanis who is looking for me and making all that noise. Don't you hear: 'Mme Piquignolles, Mme Piquignolles?' Saved, saved!"

"Stanis was still quite pale, and in a panting voice he cried out to them: 'Nothing serious, only that fool Frémecourt who lent me the rooms has forgotten to pay for his piano for the last five months, a hundred francs² a month. You understand; they came to claim it, and as we did not reply, why, they fetched the police commissary and gained entrance in the name of the law.'

"A nice fright to give one! Madame Piquignolles said, throwing herself onto a chair. 'Confound the nasty piano!'

"It may be useless to add that the marchioness has quite renounced trifles, as our forefathers used to say, and would deserve a prize for virtue if the Academy would only show itself rather more gallant toward pretty women who take crossroads in order to become virtuous.

"Emotions like that cure people of running risks of that kind!"

THAT PIG OF A MORIN

"THERE, MY FRIEND," I said to Labarbe, "you have just repeated those five words, 'That pig of a Morin.' Why on earth do I never hear Morin's name mentioned without his being called a pig?"

Labarbe, who is a deputy, looked at me with eyes like an owl's and said: "Do you mean to say that you do not know Morin's story and yet come from La Rochelle?" I was obliged to declare that I did not know Morin's story, and then Labarbe rubbed his hands and began his recital.

"You knew Morin, did you not, and you remember his large linen draper's shop on the Quai de la Rochelle?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"All right, then. You must know that in 1862 or '63 Morin went to spend a fortnight in Paris for pleasure, or for his pleasures, but under

² \$20.

the pretext of renewing his stock, and you also know what a fortnight in Paris means for a country shopkeeper; it makes his blood grow hot. The theater every evening, women's dresses rustling up against you and continual excitement; one goes almost mad with it. One sees nothing but dancers in tights, actresses in very low dresses, round legs, fat shoulders, all nearly within reach of one's hands, without daring or being able to touch, and one scarcely ever tastes an inferior dish. And one leaves it with heart still all in a flutter and a mind still exhilarated by a sort of longing for kisses which tickle one's lips.

"Morin was in that state when he took his ticket for La Rochelle by the eight-forty night express. And he was walking up and down the waiting room at the station when he stopped suddenly in front of a young lady who was kissing an old one. She had her veil up, and Morin murmured with delight: 'By Jove, what a pretty woman!'

"When she had said good-by to the old lady she went into the waiting room, and Morin followed her; then she went on to the platform, and Morin still followed her; then she got into an empty carriage, and he again followed her. There were very few travelers by the express; the engine whistled, and the train started. They were alone. Morin devoured her with his eyes. She appeared to be about nineteen or twenty and was fair, tall and with demure looks. She wrapped a railway rug round her legs and stretched herself on the seat to sleep.

"Morin asked himself: 'I wonder who she is?' And a thousand conjectures, a thousand projects went through his head. He said to himself: 'So many adventures are told as happening on railway journeys that this may be one that is going to present itself to me. Who knows? A piece of good luck like that happens very quickly, and perhaps I need only be a little venturesome. Was it not Danton who said: "Audacity, more audacity, and always audacity." If it was not Danton it was Mirabeau, but that does not matter. But then I have no audacity, and that is the difficulty. Oh! If one only knew, if one could only read people's minds! I will bet that every day one passes by magnificent opportunities without knowing it, though a gesture would be enough to let me know that she did not ask for anything better.'

"Then he imagined to himself combinations which led him to triumph. He pictured some chivalrous deed or merely some slight service which he rendered her, a lively, gallant conversation which ended in a declaration, which ended in—in what you think.

"But he could find no opening, had no pretext, and he waited for some fortunate circumstance with his heart ravaged and his mind topsyturvy. The night passed, and the pretty girl still slept while Morin was meditating his own fall. The day broke and soon the first ray of sunlight appeared in the sky, a long, clear ray which shone on the face of

the sleeping girl and woke her so she sat up, looked at the country, then at Morin and smiled. She smiled like a happy woman, with an engaging and bright look, and Morin trembled. Certainly that smile was intended for him; it was a discreet invitation, the signal which he was waiting for. That smile meant to say: 'How stupid, what a ninny, what a dolt, what a donkey you are to have sat there on your seat like a post all night. Just look at me, am I not charming? And you have sat like that for the whole night when you have been alone with a pretty woman, you great simpleton!'

"She was still smiling as she looked at him; she even began to laugh, and he lost his head trying to find something suitable to say, no matter what. But he could think of nothing, nothing, and then, seized with a coward's courage, he said to himself: 'So much the worse; I will risk everything,' and suddenly, without the slightest warning, he went toward her, his arms extended, his lips protruding, and, seizing her in his arms, kissed her.

"She sprang up with a bound, crying out: 'Help! help!' and screaming with terror; then she opened the carriage door and waved her arm outside; then, mad with terror, she was trying to jump out while Morin, who was almost distracted and feeling sure that she would throw herself out, held her by her skirt and stammered: 'Oh, madame! Oh, madame!'

"The train slackened speed and then stopped. Two guards rushed up at the young woman's frantic signals, and she threw herself into their arms, stammering: 'That man wanted—wanted—to—to——' And then she fainted.

"They were at Mauzé station, and the gendarme on duty arrested Morin. When the victim of his brutality had regained her consciousness she made her charge against him, and the police drew it up. The poor linen draper did not reach home till night, with a prosecution hanging over him for an outrage on morals in a public place.

II

"At that time I was editor of the *Fanal des Charentes*, and I used to meet Morin every day at the Café du Commerce. The day after his adventure he came to see me, as he did not know what to do. I did not hide my opinion from him but said to him: 'You are no better than a pig. No decent man behaves like that.'

"He cried. His wife had given him a beating, and he foresaw his trade ruined, his name dragged through the mire and dishonored, his friends outraged and taking no more notice of him. In the end he excited my pity, and I sent for my colleague Rivet, a bantering but very sensible little man, to give us his advice.

"He advised me to see the public prosecutor, who was a friend of mine, and so I sent Morin home and went to call on the magistrate. He told me that the woman who had been insulted was a young lady, Mademoiselle Henriette Bonnel, who had just received her certificate as governess in Paris and spent her holidays with her uncle and aunt, who were very respectable tradespeople in Mauzé, and what made Morin's case all the more serious was that the uncle had lodged a complaint. But the public official had consented to let the matter drop if this complaint were withdrawn, so that we must try and get him to do this.

"I went back to Morin's and found him in bed, ill with excitement and distress. His wife, a tall, rawboned woman with a beard, was abusing him continually, and she showed me into the room, shouting at me: 'So you have come to see that pig of a Morin. Well, there he is, the darling!' And she planted herself in front of the bed with her hands on her hips. I told him how matters stood, and he begged me to go and see her uncle and aunt. It was a delicate mission, but I undertook it, and the poor devil never ceased repeating: 'I assure you I did not even kiss her, no, not even that. I will take my oath to it!'

"I replied: 'It is all the same; you are nothing but a pig.' And I took a thousand francs which he gave me to employ them as I thought best, but as I did not care venturing to her uncle's house alone I begged Rivet to go with me, which he agreed to do on the condition that we went immediately, for he had some urgent business at La Rochelle that afternoon. So two hours later we rang at the door of a nice country house. A pretty girl came and opened the door to us, who was assuredly the young lady in question, and I said to Rivet in a low voice: 'Confound it! I begin to understand Morin!'

"The uncle, Monsieur Tonnelet, subscribed to the *Fanal* and was a fervent political co-religionist of ours. He received us with open arms and congratulated us and wished us joy; he was delighted at having the two editors in his house, and Rivet whispered to me: 'I think we shall be able to arrange the matter of that pig of a Morin for him.'

"The niece had left the room, and I introduced the delicate subject. I waved the specter of scandal before his eyes; I accentuated the inevitable depreciation which the young lady would suffer if such an affair got known, for nobody would believe in a simple kiss. The good man seemed undecided but could not make up his mind about anything without his wife, who would not be in until late that evening. But suddenly he uttered an exclamation of triumph: 'Look here, I have an excellent idea. I will keep you here to dine and sleep, and when my wife comes home I hope we shall be able to arrange matters.'

"Rivet resisted at first, but the wish to extricate that pig of a Morin

decided him, and we accepted the invitation. So the uncle got up radiant, called his niece and proposed that we should take a stroll in his grounds, saying: 'We will leave serious matters until the morning.' Rivet and he began to talk politics, while I soon found myself lagging a little behind with the girl, who was really charming! charming! and with the greatest precaution I began to speak to her about her adventure and try to make her my ally. She did not, however, appear the least confused and listened to me like a person who was enjoying the whole thing very much.

"I said to her: 'Just think, mademoiselle, how unpleasant it will be for you. You will have to appear in court, to encounter malicious looks, to speak before everybody and to recount that unfortunate occurrence in the railway carriage in public. Do you not think, between ourselves, that it would have been much better for you to have put that dirty scoundrel back into his place without calling for assistance and merely to have changed your carriage?' She began to laugh and replied: 'What you say is quite true! But what could I do? I was frightened, and when one is frightened one does not stop to reason with oneself. As soon as I realized the situation I was very sorry that I had called out, but then it was too late. You must also remember that the idiot threw himself upon me like a madman, without saying a word and looking like a lunatic. I did not even know what he wanted of me.'

"She looked me full in the face, without being nervous or intimidated, and I said to myself: 'She is a funny sort of girl, that; I can quite see how that pig Morin came to make a mistake,' and I went on jokingly: 'Come, mademoiselle, confess that he was excusable; for, after all, a man cannot find himself opposite such a pretty girl as you are without feeling a legitimate desire to kiss her.'

"She laughed more than ever and showed her teeth and said: 'Between the desire and the act, monsieur, there is room for respect.' It was a funny expression to use, although it was not very clear, and I asked abruptly: 'Well, now, supposing I were to kiss you now, what would you do?' She stopped to look at me from head to foot and then said calmly: 'Oh! you? That is quite another matter.'

"I knew perfectly well, by Jove, that it was not the same thing at all, as everybody in the neighborhood called me 'Handsome Labarbe.' I was thirty years old in those days, but I asked her: 'And why, pray?'

"She shrugged her shoulders and replied: 'Well, because you are not so stupid as he is.' And then she added, looking at me slyly: 'Nor so ugly, either.'

"Before she could make a movement to avoid me I had implanted a hearty kiss on her cheek. She sprang aside, but it was too late, and

then she said: 'Well, you are not very bashful, either! But don't do that sort of thing again.'

"I put on a humble look and said in a low voice: 'Oh! mademoiselle, as for me, if I long for one thing more than another, it is to be summoned before a magistrate on the same charge as Morin.'

"'Why?' she asked.

"Looking steadily at her, I replied: 'Because you are one of the most beautiful creatures living, because it would be an honor and a glory for me to have offered you violence and because people would have said, after seeing you: "Well, Labarbe has richly deserved what he has got, but he is a lucky fellow all the same."'

"She began to laugh heartily again and said: 'How funny you are!' And she had not finished the word *funny* before I had her in my arms and was kissing her ardently wherever I could find a place, on her forehead, on her eyes, on her lips occasionally, on her cheeks, in fact all over her head, some part of which she was obliged to leave exposed, in spite of herself, in order to defend the others. At last she managed to release herself, blushing and angry. 'You are very unmannerly, monsieur,' she said, 'and I am sorry I listened to you.'

"I took her hand in some confusion and stammered out: 'I beg your pardon, mademoiselle. I have offended you; I have acted like a brute! Do not be angry with me for what I have done. If you knew——'

"I vainly sought for some excuse, and in a few moments she said: 'There is nothing for me to know, monsieur.' But I had found something to say, and I cried: 'Mademoiselle, I love you!'

"She was really surprised and raised her eyes to look at me, and I went on: 'Yes, mademoiselle, and pray listen to me. I do not know Morin, and I do not care anything about him. It does not matter to me the least if he is committed for trial and locked up meanwhile. I saw you here last year, and I was so taken with you that the thought of you has never left me since, and it does not matter to me whether you believe me or not. I thought you adorable, and the remembrance of you took such a hold on me that I longed to see you again, and so I made use of that fool Morin as a pretext, and here I am. Circumstances have made me exceed the due limits of respect, and I can only beg you to pardon me.'

"She read the truth in my looks and was ready to smile again; then she murmured: 'You humbug!' But I raised my hand and said in a sincere voice (and I really believe that I was sincere): 'I swear to you that I am speaking the truth.' She replied quite simply: 'Really?'

"We were alone, quite alone, as Rivet and her uncle had disappeared in a side walk, and I made her a real declaration of love while I

squeezed and kissed her hands, and she listened to it as to something new and agreeable, without exactly knowing how much of it she was to believe, while in the end I felt agitated and at last really myself believed what I said. I was pale, anxious and trembling, and I gently put my arm round her waist and spoke to her softly, whispering into the little curls over her ears. She seemed dead, so absorbed in thought was she.

"Then her hand touched mine, and she pressed it, and I gently circled her waist with a trembling, and gradually a firmer, grasp. She did not move now, and I touched her cheeks with my lips, and suddenly, without seeking them, mine met hers. It was a long, long kiss, and it would have lasted longer still if I had not heard a *Hum! hum!* just behind me. She made her escape through the bushes, and I, turning round, saw Rivet coming toward me and walking in the middle of the path. He said without even smiling: 'So that is the way in which you settle the affair of that pig Morin.'

"I replied conceitedly: 'One does what one can, my dear fellow. But what about the uncle? How have you got on with him? I will answer for the niece.'

"'I have not been so fortunate with him,' he replied. Whereupon I took his arm and we went indoors.

III

"Dinner made me lose my head altogether. I sat beside her, and my hand continually met hers under the tablecloth, my foot touched hers and our looks encountered each other.

"After dinner we took a walk by moonlight, and I whispered all the tender things I could think of to her. I held her close to me, kissed her every moment, moistening my lips against hers, while her uncle and Rivet were disputing as they walked in front of us. We went in, and soon a messenger brought a telegram from her aunt, saying that she would return by the first train the next morning at seven o'clock.

"'Very well, Henriette,' her uncle said, 'go and show the gentlemen their rooms.' She showed Rivet his first, and he whispered to me: 'There was no danger of her taking us into yours first.' Then she took⁴ me to my room, and as soon as she was alone with me I took her in my arms again and tried to excite her senses and overcome her resistance, but when she felt that she was near succumbing she escaped out of the room, and I got between the sheets, very much put out and excited and feeling rather foolish, for I knew that I should not sleep much. I was wondering how I could have committed such a mistake when there was a gentle knock at my door, and on my asking who was there a low voice replied: 'I.'

"I dressed myself quickly and opened the door, and she came in. 'I forgot to ask you what you take in the morning,' she said, 'chocolate, tea or coffee?' I put my arms around her impetuously and said, devouring her with kisses: 'I will take—I will take—' But she freed herself from my arms, blew out my candle and disappeared and left me alone in the dark, furious, trying to find some matches and not able to do so. At last I got some and I went into the passage, feeling half mad, with my candlestick in my hand.

"What was I going to do? I did not stop to reason; I only wanted to find her, and I would. I went a few steps without reflecting, but then I suddenly thought to myself: 'Suppose I should go into the uncle's room, what should I say?' And I stood still, with my head a void and my heart beating.

"But in a few moments I thought of an answer: 'Of course I shall say that I was looking for Rivet's room, to speak to him about an important matter,' and I began to inspect all the doors, trying to find hers, and at last I took hold of a handle at a venture, turned it and went in. There was Henriette, sitting on her bed and looking at me in tears. So I gently turned the key, and going up to her on tiptoe, I said: 'I forgot to ask you for something to read, mademoiselle.' I will not tell you the book I read, but it is the most wonderful of romances, the most divine of poems. And when once I had turned the first page she let me turn over as many leaves as I liked, and I got through so many chapters that our candles were quite burned out.

"Then, after thanking her, I was stealthily returning to my room when a rough hand seized me and a voice—it was Rivet's—whispered in my ear: 'So you have not yet quite settled that affair of Morin's?'

"At seven o'clock the next morning she herself brought me a cup of chocolate. I have never drunk anything like it, soft, velvety, perfumed, delicious. I could scarcely take away my lips from the cup, and she had hardly left the room when Rivet came in. He seemed nervous and irritable like a man who had not slept, and he said to me crossly: 'If you go on like this, you will end by spoiling the affair of that pig of a Morin!'

"At eight o'clock the aunt arrived. Our discussion was very short, for they withdrew their complaint, and I left five hundred francs for the poor of the town. They wanted to keep us for the day, and they arranged an excursion to go and see some ruins. Henriette made signs to me to stay, behind her uncle's back, and I accepted, but Rivet was determined to go, and though I took him aside and begged and prayed him to do this for me, he appeared quite exasperated and kept saying to me: 'I have had enough of that pig of a Morin's affair, do you hear?'

"Of course I was obliged to go also, and it was one of the hardest moments of my life. I could have gone on arranging that business as long as I lived, and when we were in the railway carriage, after shaking hands with her in silence, I said to Rivet: 'You are a mere brute!' And he replied: 'My dear fellow, you were beginning to excite me confoundedly.'

"On getting to the *Fanal* office, I saw a crowd waiting for us, and as soon as they saw us they all exclaimed: 'Well, have you settled the affair of that pig of a Morin?' All La Rochelle was excited about it, and Rivet, who had got over his ill-humor on the journey, had great difficulty in keeping himself from laughing as he said: 'Yes, we have managed it, thanks to Labarbe.' And we went to Morin's.

"He was sitting in an easy chair with mustard plasters on his legs and cold bandages on his head, nearly dead with misery. He was coughing with the short cough of a dying man, without anyone knowing how he had caught it, and his wife seemed like a tigress ready to eat him. As soon as he saw us he trembled violently as to make his hands and knees shake, so I said to him immediately: 'It is all settled, you dirty scamp, but don't do such a thing again.'

"He got up choking, took my hands and kissed them as if they had belonged to a prince, cried, nearly fainted, embraced Rivet and even kissed Madame Morin, who gave him such a push as to send him staggering back into his chair. But he never got over the blow; his mind had been too much upset. In all the country round, moreover, he was called nothing but that pig of a Morin, and the epithet went through him like a sword thrust every time he heard it. When a street boy called after him: 'Pig!' he turned his head instinctively. His friends also overwhelmed him with horrible jokes and used to chaff him, whenever they were eating ham, by saying: 'It's a bit of you!' He died two years later.

"As for myself, when I was a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies in 1875 I called on the new notary at Foncerre, Monsieur Belloncle, to solicit his vote, and a tall, handsome and evidently wealthy lady received me. 'You do not know me again?' she said.

"I stammered out: 'But—no, madame.'

" 'Henriette Bonnel?'

" 'Ah! And I felt myself turning pale, while she seemed perfectly at her ease and looked at me with a smile.

"As soon as she had left me alone with her husband he took both my hands, and squeezing them as if he meant to crush them, he said: 'I have been intending to go and see you for a long time, my dear sir, for my wife has very often talked to me about you. I know under what painful circumstances you made her acquaintance, and I know also

how perfectly you behaved, how full of delicacy, tact and devotion you showed yourself in the affair . . .’ He hesitated and then said in a lower tone, as if he had been saying something low and coarse: ‘In the affair of that pig of a Morin.’”

THE HOLE

CUTS AND WOUNDS WHICH CAUSED DEATH

THAT was the heading of the charge which brought Leopold Renard, upholsterer, before the Assize Court.

Round him were the principal witnesses, Mme Flamèche, widow of the victim, Louis Ladureau, cabinetmaker, and Jean Durdent, plumber.

Near the criminal was his wife, dressed in black, a little ugly woman who looked like a monkey dressed as a lady.

This is how Renard described the drama:

“Good heavens, it is a misfortune of which I am the first and last victim and with which my will has nothing to do. The facts are their own commentary, Monsieur le Président. I am an honest man, a hard-working man, an upholsterer in the same street for the last sixteen years, known, liked, respected and esteemed by all, as my neighbors have testified, even the porter, who is not *folâtre* every day. I am fond of work, I am fond of saving, I like honest men and respectable pleasures. That is what has ruined me, so much the worse for me; but as my will had nothing to do with it, I continue to respect myself.

“Every Sunday for the last five years my wife and I have spent the day at Passy. We get fresh air, not to say that we are fond of fishing—as fond of it as we are of small onions. Mélie inspired me with that passion, the jade; she is more enthusiastic than I am, the scold, and all the mischief in this business is her fault, as you will see immediately.

“I am strong and mild-tempered, without a pennyworth of malice in me. But she, oh la la! She looks insignificant, she is short and thin, but she does more mischief than a weasel. I do not deny that she has some good qualities; she has some, and those very important to a man in business. But her character! Just ask about it in the neighborhood; even the porter’s wife, who has just sent me about my business—she will tell you something about it.

“Every day she used to find fault with my mild temper: ‘I would not put up with this! I would not put up with that.’ If I had listened to her, Monsieur le Président, I should have had at least three bouts of fisticuffs a month.”

Mme Renard interrupted him: "And for good reasons too; they laugh best who laugh last."

He turned toward her frankly. "Oh! very well, I can blame you, since you were the cause of it."

Then, facing the president again, he said:

"I will continue. We used to go to Passy every Saturday evening, so as to be able to begin fishing at daybreak the next morning. It is a habit which has become second nature with us, as the saying is. Three years ago this summer I discovered a place, oh! such a spot! There, in the shade, were eight feet of water at least and perhaps ten, a hole with a *retour* under the bank, a regular retreat for fish and a paradise for any fisherman. I might look upon that hole as my property, Monsieur le Président, as I was its Christopher Columbus. Everybody in the neighborhood knew it, without making any opposition. They used to say: 'That is Renard's place'; and nobody would have gone to it, not even Monsieur Plumsay, who is renowned, be it said without any offense, for appropriating other people's places.

"Well, I went as usual to that place, of which I felt as certain as if I had owned it. I had scarcely got there on Saturday when I got into Delila, with my wife. Delila is my Norwegian boat which I had built by Fourmaise and which is light and safe. Well, as I said, we got into the boat and we were going to bait, and for baiting there is nobody to be compared with me, and they all know it. You want to know with what I bait? I cannot answer that question; it has nothing to do with the accident; I cannot answer, that is my secret. There are more than three hundred people who have asked me; I have been offered glasses of brandy and liquors, fried fish, matelots,¹ to make me tell! But just go and try whether the chub will come. Ah! they have patted my stomach to get at my secret, my recipe. Only my wife knows, and she will not tell it any more than I shall! Is not that so, Mélie?"

The president of the court interrupted him:

"Just get to the facts as soon as you can."

The accused continued: "I am getting to them; I am getting to them. Well, on Saturday, July eighth, we left by the five-twenty-five train, and before dinner we went to ground bait as usual. The weather promised to keep fine, and I said to Mélie: 'All right for tomorrow!' And she replied: 'It looks like it.' We never talk more than that together.

"And then we returned to dinner. I was happy and thirsty, and that was the cause of everything. I said to Mélie: 'Look here, Mélie, it is fine weather, so suppose I drink a bottle of *Casque à mèche*. That is a little white wine which we have christened so because if you drink

¹ A preparation of several kinds of fish with a sharp sauce.

too much of it it prevents you from sleeping and is the opposite of a nightcap. Do you understand me?

"She replied: 'You can do as you please, but you will be ill again and will not be able to get up tomorrow.' That was true, sensible, prudent and clear-sighted, I must confess. Nevertheless, I could not withstand it, and I drank my bottle. It all comes from that.

"Well, I could not sleep. By Jove! It kept me awake till two o'clock in the morning, and then I went to sleep so soundly that I should not have heard the angel shouting at the Last Judgment.

"In short, my wife woke me at six o'clock and I jumped out of bed, hastily put on my trousers and jersey, washed my face and jumped on board Delila. But it was too late, for when I arrived at my hole it was already taken! Such a thing had never happened to me in three years, and it made me feel as if I were being robbed under my own eyes. I said to myself, 'Confound it all! Confound it!' And then my wife began to nag at me. 'Eh! What about your *Casque à mèche*! Get along, you drunkard! Are you satisfied, you great fool!' I could say nothing, because it was all quite true, and so I landed all the same near the spot and tried to profit by what was left. Perhaps, after all, the fellow might catch nothing and go away.

"He was a little thin man in white linen coat and waistcoat and with a large straw hat, and his wife, a fat woman who was doing embroidery, was behind him.

"When she saw us take up our position close to their place she murmured: 'I suppose there are no other places on the river!' And my wife, who was furious, replied: 'People who know how to behave make inquiries about the habits of the neighborhood before occupying reserved spots.'

"As I did not want a fuss I said to her: 'Hold your tongue, Mélie. Let them go on, let them go on; we shall see.'

"Well, we had fastened Delila under the willow trees and had landed and were fishing side by side, Mélie and I, close to the two others; but here, monsieur, I must enter into details.

"We had only been there about five minutes when our male neighbor's float began to go down two or three times, and then he pulled out a chub as thick as my thigh, rather less, perhaps, but nearly as big! My heart beat and the perspiration stood on my forehead, and Mélie said to me: 'Well, you sot, did you see that?'

"Just then Monsieur Bru, the grocer of Poissy, who was fond of gudgeon fishing, passed in a boat and called out to me: 'So somebody has taken your usual place, Monsieur Renard?' And I replied: 'Yes, Monsieur Bru, there are some people in this world who do not know the usages of common politeness.'

"The little man in linen pretended not to hear, nor his fat lump of a wife, either."

Here the president interrupted him a second time: "Take care, you are insulting the widow, Madame Flamèche, who is present."

Renard made his excuses: "I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon; my anger carried me away. . . . Well, not a quarter of an hour had passed when the little man caught another chub and another almost immediately and another five minutes later.

"The tears were in my eyes, and then I knew that Madame Renard was boiling with rage, for she kept on nagging at me: 'Oh, how horrid! Don't you see that he is robbing you of your fish? Do you think that you will catch anything? Not even a frog, nothing whatever. Why, my hands are burning just to think of it.'

"But I said to myself: 'Let us wait until twelve o'clock. Then this poaching fellow will go to lunch, and I shall get my place again.' As for me, Monsieur le Président, I lunch on the spot every Sunday; we bring our provisions in Delila. But there! At twelve o'clock the wretch produced a fowl out of a newspaper, and while he was eating, actually he caught another chub!

"Mélie and I had morsel also, just a mouthful, a mere nothing, for our heart was not in it.

"Then I took up my newspaper, to aid my digestion. Every Sunday I read the *Gil Blas* in the shade like that, by the side of the water. It is Columbine's day, you know, Columbine who writes the articles in the *Gil Blas*. I generally put Madame Renard into a passion by pretending to know this Columbine. It is not true, for I do not know her and have never seen her, but that does not matter; she writes very well, and then she says things straight out for a woman. She suits me, and there are not many of her sort.

"Well, I began to tease my wife, but she got angry immediately and very angry, and so I held my tongue. At that moment our two witnesses, who are present here, Monsieur Ladureau and Monsieur Durdent, appeared on the other side of the river. We knew each other by sight. The little man began to fish again, and he caught so many that I trembled with vexation, and his wife said: 'It is an uncommonly good spot, and we will come here always, Desiré.' As for me, a cold shiver ran down my back, and Madame Renard kept repeating: 'You are not a man; you have the blood of a chicken in your veins'; and suddenly I said to her: 'Look here, I would rather go away, or I shall only be doing something foolish.'

"And she whispered to me as if she had put a red-hot iron under my nose: 'You are not a man. Now you are going to run away and surrender your place! Off you go, Bazaine!'

"Well, I felt that, but yet I did not move while the other fellow pulled out a bream. Oh! I never saw such a large one before, never! And then my wife began to talk aloud, as if she were thinking, and you can see her trickery. She said: 'That is what one might call stolen fish, seeing that we baited the place ourselves. At any rate they ought to give us back the money we have spent on bait.'

"Then the fat woman in the cotton dress said in turn: 'Do you mean to call us thieves, madame?' And they began to explain, and then they came to words. Oh Lord! those creatures know some good ones. They shouted so loud that our two witnesses, who were on the other bank, began to call out by way of a joke: 'Less noise over there; you will prevent your husbands from fishing.'

"The fact is that neither of us moved any more than if we had been two tree stumps. We remained there, with our noses over the water, as if we had heard nothing; but, by Jove, we heard all the same. 'You are a mere liar.'

"'You are nothing better than a streetwalker.'

"'You are only a trollop.'

"'You are a regular strumpet.'

"And so on and so on; a sailor could not have said more.

"Suddenly I heard a noise behind me and turned round. It was the other one, the fat woman, who had fallen on to my wife with her parasol. *Whack! whack!* Mélie got two of them, but she was furious, and she hits hard when she is in a rage, so she caught the fat woman by the hair and then, *thump, thump*. Slaps in the face rained down like ripe plums. I should have let them go on—women among themselves, men among themselves—it does not do to mix the blows, but the little man in the linen jacket jumped up like a devil and was going to rush at my wife. Ah! no, no, not that, my friend! I caught the gentleman with the end of my fist, *crash, crash*, one on the nose, the other in the stomach. He threw up his arms and legs and fell on his back into the river, just into the hole.

"I should have fished him out most certainly, Monsieur le Président, if I had had the time. But unfortunately the fat woman got the better of it, and she was drubbing Mélie terribly. I know that I ought not to have assisted her while the man was drinking his fill, but I never thought that he would drown and said to myself: 'Bah, it will cool him.'

"I therefore ran up to the women to separate them, and all I received was scratches and bites. Good lord, what creatures! Well, it took me five minutes, and perhaps ten, to separate those two viragoes. When I turned around there was nothing to be seen, and the water was as smooth as a lake. The others yonder kept shouting: 'Fish him out!'

It was all very well to say that, but I cannot swim and still less dive!

"At last the man from the dam came and two gentlemen with boat hooks, but it had taken over a quarter of an hour. He was found at the bottom of the hole in eight feet of water, as I have said, but he was dead, the poor little man in his linen suit! There are the facts, such as I have sworn to. I am innocent, on my honor."

The witnesses having deposed to the same effect, the accused was acquitted.

A FAMILY

I WAS GOING to see my friend Simon Radevin once more, for I had not seen him for fifteen years. Formerly he was my most intimate friend, and I used to spend long, quiet and happy evenings with him. He was one of those men to whom one tells the most intimate affairs of the heart and in whom one finds, when quietly talking, rare, clever, ingenious and refined thoughts—thoughts which stimulate and capture the mind.

For years we had scarcely been separated: we had lived, traveled, thought and dreamed together, had liked the same things with the same liking, admired the same books, comprehended the same works, shivered with the same sensations and very often laughed at the same individuals, whom we understood completely by merely exchanging a glance.

Then he married—quite unexpectedly married a little girl from the provinces, who had come to Paris in search of a husband. How ever could that little, thin, insipidly fair girl, with her weak hands, her light, vacant eyes and her clear, silly voice, who was exactly like a hundred thousand marriageable dolls, have picked up that intelligent, clever young fellow? Can anyone understand these things? No doubt he had hoped for happiness, simple, quiet and long-enduring happiness, in the arms of a good, tender and faithful woman; he had seen all that in the transparent looks of that schoolgirl with light hair.

He had not dreamed of the fact that an active, living and vibrating man grows tired as soon as he has comprehended the stupid reality of a commonplace life, unless, indeed, he becomes so brutalized as to be callous to externals.

What would he be like when I met him again? Still lively, witty, light-hearted and enthusiastic, or in a state of mental torpor through

provincial life? A man can change a great deal in the course of fifteen years!

The train stopped at a small station, and as I got out of the carriage a stout, a very stout man with red cheeks and a big stomach rushed up to me with open arms, exclaiming: "George!"

I embraced him, but I had not recognized him, and then I said in astonishment: "By Jove! You have not grown thin!"

And he replied with a laugh: "What did you expect? Good living, a good table and good nights! Eating and sleeping, that is my existence!"

I looked at him closely, trying to find the features I held so dear in that broad face. His eyes alone had not altered, but I no longer saw the same look in them, and I said to myself: "If looks be the reflection of the mind, the thoughts in that head are not what they used to be—those thoughts which I knew so well."

Yet his eyes were bright, full of pleasure and friendship, but they had not that clear, intelligent expression which tells better than do words the value of the mind. Suddenly he said to me:

"Here are my two eldest children." A girl of fourteen, who was almost a woman, and a boy of thirteen, in the dress of a pupil from a lycée, came forward in a hesitating and awkward manner, and I said in a low voice: "Are they yours?"

"Of course they are," he replied, laughing.

"How many have you?"

"Five! There are three more indoors."

He said that in a proud, self-satisfied, almost triumphant manner, and I felt profound pity, mingled with a feeling of vague contempt, for this vainglorious and simple reproducer of his species who spent his nights in his country house in uxorious pleasures.

I got into a carriage, which he drove himself, and we set off through the town, a dull, sleepy, gloomy town where nothing was moving in the streets save a few dogs and two or three maidservants. Here and there a shopkeeper standing at his door took off his hat, and Simon returned the salute and told me the man's name—no doubt to show me that he knew all the inhabitants personally. The thought struck me that he was thinking of becoming a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, that dream of all who have buried themselves in the provinces.

We were soon out of the town; the carriage turned into a garden which had some pretensions to a park and stopped in front of a turreted house which tried to pass for a château.

"That is my den," Simon said, so that he might be complimented on it, and I replied that it was delightful.

A lady appeared on the steps, dressed up for a visitor, her hair done

for a visitor and with phrases ready prepared for a visitor. She was no longer the light-haired insipid girl I had seen in church fifteen years previously, but a stout lady in curls and flounces, one of those ladies of uncertain age, without intellect, without any of those things which constitute a woman. In short she was a mother, a stout, commonplace mother, a human layer and brood mare, a machine of flesh which procreates, without mental care save for her children and her housekeeping book.

She welcomed me, and I went into the hall where three children, ranged according to their height, were ranked for review like firemen before a mayor. "Ah! ah! so there are the others?" said I. And Simon, who was radiant with pleasure, named them: "Jean, Sophie, and Contran."

The door of the drawing room was open. I went in, and in the depths of an easy chair I saw something trembling, a man, an old, paralyzed man. Mme Radevin came forward and said: "This is my grandfather, monsieur; he is eighty-seven." And then she shouted into the shaking old man's ears: "This is a friend of Simon's, grandpapa."

The old gentleman tried to say "Good day" to me, and he muttered: "Oua, oua, oua," and waved his hand.

I took a seat, saying: "You are very kind, monsieur."

Simon had just come in, and he said with a laugh: "So! You have made Grandpapa's acquaintance. He is priceless, is that old man. He is the delight of the children, and he is so greedy that he almost kills himself at every meal. You have no idea what he would eat if he were allowed to do as he pleased. But you will see, you will see. He looks all the sweets over as if they were so many girls. You have never seen anything funnier; you will see it presently."

I was then shown to my room to change my dress for dinner, and hearing a great clatter behind me on the stairs, I turned round and saw that all the children were following me behind their father—to do me honor, no doubt.

My windows looked out onto a plain, a bare, interminable plain, an ocean of grass, of wheat and of oats without a clump of trees or any rising ground, a striking and melancholy picture of the life which they must be leading in that house.

A bell rang; it was for dinner, and so I went downstairs. Mme Radevin took my arm in a ceremonious manner, and we went into the dining room. A footman wheeled in the old man's armchair, who gave a greedy and curious look at the dessert as with difficulty he turned his shaking head from one dish to the other.

Simon rubbed his hands, saying: "You will be amused." All the children understood that I was going to be indulged with the sight of

their greedy grandfather and they began to laugh accordingly, while their mother merely smiled and shrugged her shoulders. Simon, making a speaking trumpet of his hands, shouted at the old man: "This evening there is sweet rice cream," and the wrinkled face of the grandfather brightened; he trembled violently all over, showing that he had understood and was very pleased. The dinner began.

"Just look!" Simon whispered. The grandfather did not like the soup and refused to eat it, but he was made to, on account of his health. The footman forced the spoon into his mouth, while the old man blew energetically, so as not to swallow the soup, which was thus scattered like a stream of water onto the table and over his neighbors. The children shook with delight at the spectacle, while their father, who was also amused, said: "Isn't the old man funny?"

During the whole meal they were all taken up solely with him. With his eyes he devoured the dishes which were put on the table and with trembling hands tried to seize them and pull them to him. They put them almost within his reach to see his useless efforts, his trembling clutches at them, the piteous appeal of his whole nature, of his eyes, of his mouth and of his nose as he smelled them. He slobbered onto his table napkin with eagerness while uttering inarticulate grunts, and the whole family was highly amused at this horrible and grotesque scene.

Then they put a tiny morsel onto his plate, which he ate with feverish gluttony in order to get something more as soon as possible. When the rice cream was brought in he nearly had a fit and groaned with greediness. Gontran called out to him: "You have eaten too much already; you will have no more." And they pretended not to give him any. Then he began to cry—cry and tremble more violently than ever, while all the children laughed. At last, however, they gave him his helping, a very small piece. As he ate the first mouthful of the pudding he made a comical and greedy noise in his throat and a movement with his neck like ducks do when they swallow too large a morsel, and then, when he had done, he began to stamp his feet so as to get more.

I was seized with pity for this pitiable and ridiculous Tantalus and interposed on his behalf. "Please, will you not give him a little more rice?"

But Simon replied: "Oh no, my dear fellow; if he were to eat too much, it might harm him at his age."

I held my tongue and thought over these words. Oh, ethics! Oh, logic! Oh, wisdom! At his age! So they deprived him of his only remaining pleasure out of regard for his health! His health! What would he do with it, inert and trembling wreck that he was? They were taking care of his life, so they said. His life? How many days? Ten, twenty, fifty or a hundred? Why? For his own sake? Or to preserve, for some

time longer, the spectacle of his impotent greediness in the family?

There was nothing left for him to do in this life, nothing whatever. He had one single wish left, one sole pleasure; why not grant him that last solace constantly, until he died?

After playing cards for a long time I went up to my room and to bed; I was low-spirited and sad, sad, sad! I sat at my window, but I heard nothing but the beautiful warbling of a bird in a tree, somewhere in the distance. No doubt the bird was singing thus in a low voice during the night to lull his mate, who was sleeping on her eggs.

And I thought of my poor friend's five children and to myself pictured him snoring by the side of his ugly wife.

BELLFLOWER¹

How STRANGE are those old recollections which haunt us without our being able to get rid of them!

This one is so very old that I cannot understand how it has clung so vividly and tenaciously to my memory. Since then I have seen so many sinister things, either affecting or terrible, that I am astonished at not being able to pass a single day without the face of Mother Bellflower recurring to my mind's eye, just as I knew her formerly long, long ago, when I was ten or twelve years old.

She was an old seamstress who came to my parents' house once a week, every Thursday, to mend the linen. My parents lived in one of those country houses called *châteaux*, which are merely old houses with pointed roofs, to which are attached three or four adjacent farms.

The village, a large village, almost a small market town, was a few hundred yards off and nestled round the church, a red brick church, which had become black with age.

Well, every Thursday Mother Bellflower came between half-past six and seven in the morning and went immediately into the linen room and began to work. She was a tall, thin, bearded or rather hairy woman, for she had a beard all over her face, a surprising, an unexpected beard, growing in improbable tufts, in curly bunches which looked as if they had been sown by a madman over that great face, the face of a gendarme in petticoats. She had them on her nose, under her nose, round her nose, on her chin, on her cheeks, and her eyebrows, which were extraordinarily thick and long and quite gray, bushy and bristling, looked exactly like a pair of mustaches stuck on there by mistake.

She limped, not like lame people generally do, but like a ship pitch-

¹ *Clochette*.

ing. When she planted her great bony, vibrant body on her sound leg, she seemed to be preparing to mount some enormous wave, and then suddenly she dipped as if to disappear in an abyss and buried herself in the ground. Her walk reminded one of a ship in a storm, and her head, which was always covered with an enormous white cap, whose ribbons fluttered down her back, seemed to traverse the horizon from north to south and from south to north at each limp.

I adored Mother Bellflower. As soon as I was up I used to go into the linen room, where I found her installed at work with a foot warmer under her feet. As soon as I arrived she made me take the foot warmer and sit upon it, so that I might not catch cold in that large chilly room under the roof.

"That draws the blood from your head," she would say to me.

She told me stories while mending the linen with her long, crooked, nimble fingers; behind her magnifying spectacles, for age had impaired her sight, her eyes appeared enormous to me, strangely profound, double.

As far as I can remember from the things which she told me and by which my childish heart was moved, she had the large heart of a poor woman. She told me what had happened in the village, how a cow had escaped from the cow house and had been found the next morning in front of Prosper Malet's mill looking at the sails turning, or about a hen's egg which had been found in the church belfry without anyone being able to understand what creature had been there to lay it, or the queer story of Jean Pila's dog who had gone ten leagues to bring back his master's breeches which a tramp had stolen while they were hanging up to dry out of doors after he had been caught in the rain. She told me these simple adventures in such a manner that in my mind they assumed the proportions of never-to-be-forgotten dramas, of grand and mysterious poems; and the ingenious stories invented by the poets, which my mother told me in the evening, had none of the flavor, none of the fullness or of the vigor of the peasant woman's narratives.

Well, one Thursday when I had spent all the morning in listening to Mother Clochette, I wanted to go upstairs to her again during the day after picking hazelnuts with the manservant in the wood behind the farm. I remember it all as clearly as what happened only yesterday.

On opening the door of the linen room I saw the old seamstress lying on the floor by the side of her chair, her face turned down and her arms stretched out, but still holding her needle in one hand and one of my shirts in the other. One of her legs in a blue stocking, the longer one no doubt, was extended under her chair, and her spectacles glistened by the wall, where they had rolled away from her.

I ran away uttering shrill cries. They all came running, and in a few minutes I was told that Mother Clochette was dead.

I cannot describe the profound, poignant, terrible emotion which stirred my childish heart. I went slowly down into the drawing room and hid myself in a dark corner in the depths of a great old armchair, where I knelt and wept. I remained there for a long time, no doubt, for night came on. Suddenly someone came in with a lamp—without seeing me, however—and I heard my father and mother talking with the medical man, whose voice I recognized.

He had been sent for immediately, and he was explaining the cause of the accident, of which I understood nothing, however. Then he sat down and had a glass of liqueur and a biscuit.

He went on talking, and what he then said will remain engraved on my mind until I die! I think that I can give the exact words which he used.

"Ah!" he said. "The poor woman! she broke her leg the day of my arrival here. I had not even had time to wash my hands after getting off the diligence before I was sent for in all haste, for it was a bad case, very bad.

"She was seventeen and a pretty girl, very pretty! Would anyone believe it? I have never told her story before; in fact, no one but myself and one other person, who is no longer living in this part of the country, ever knew it. Now that she is dead I may be less discreet.

"A young assistant teacher had just come to live in the village; he was good looking and had the bearing of a soldier. All the girls ran after him, but he was disdainful. Besides that, he was very much afraid of his superior, the schoolmaster, old Grabu, who occasionally got out of bed the wrong foot first.

"Old Grabu already employed pretty Hortense, who has just died here and who was afterward nicknamed Clochette. The assistant master singled out the pretty young girl who was no doubt flattered at being chosen by this disdainful conqueror; at any rate, she fell in love with him, and he succeeded in persuading her to give him a first meeting in the hayloft behind the school at night after she had done her day's sewing.

"She pretended to go home, but instead of going downstairs when she left the Grabus', she went upstairs and hid among the hay to wait for her lover. He soon joined her, and he was beginning to say pretty things to her, when the door of the hayloft opened and the schoolmaster appeared and asked: 'What are you doing up there, Sigisbert?' Feeling sure that he would be caught, the young schoolmaster lost his presence of mind and replied stupidly: 'I came up here to rest a little among the bundles of hay, Monsieur Grabu.'

"The loft is very large and absolutely dark. Sigisbert pushed the frightened girl to the farther end and said: 'Go there and hide yourself. I shall lose my situation, so get away and hide yourself.'

"When the schoolmaster heard the whispering he continued: 'Why, you are not by yourself.'

"'Yes, I am, Monsieur Grabu!'

"'But you are not, for you are talking.'

"'I swear I am, Monsieur Grabu.'

"'I will soon find out,' the old man replied and, double-locking the door, he went down to get a light.

"Then the young man, who was a coward such as one sometimes meets, lost his head, and he repeated, having grown furious all of a sudden: "Hide yourself, so that he may not find you. You will deprive me of my bread for my whole life; you will ruin my whole career! Do hide yourself!"

"They could hear the key turning in the lock again, and Hortense ran to the window which looked out onto the street, opened it quickly and then in a low and determined voice said: "You will come and pick me up when he is gone,' and she jumped out.

"Old Grabu found nobody and went down again in great surprise! A quarter of an hour later Monsieur Sigisbert came to me and related his adventure. The girl had remained at the foot of the wall, unable to get up, as she had fallen from the second story, and I went with him to fetch her. It was raining in torrents, and I brought the unfortunate girl home with me, for the right leg was broken in three places, and the bones had come out through the flesh. She did not complain and merely said with admirable resignation: 'I am punished, well punished!'

"I sent for assistance and for the workgirl's friends and told them a made-up story of a runaway carriage which had knocked her down and lamed her outside my door. They believed me, and the gendarmes for a whole month tried in vain to find the author of this accident.

"That is all! Now I say that this woman was a heroine and had the fiber of those who accomplish the grandest deeds in history.

"That was her only love affair, and she died a virgin. She was a martyr, a noble soul, a sublimely devoted woman! And if I did not absolutely admire her I should not have told you this story, which I would never tell anyone during her life; you understand why."

The doctor ceased; Mamma cried, and Papa said some words which I did not catch; then they left the room, and I remained on my knees in the armchair and sobbed, while I heard a strange noise of heavy footsteps and something knocking against the side of the staircase.

They were carrying away Clochette's body.

IN THE WOOD

THE MAYOR was just going to sit down to breakfast, when he was told that the rural policeman was waiting for him at the *mairie* with two prisoners. He went there immediately and found old Hochedur standing up and watching a middle-class couple of mature years with stern looks.

The man, a fat old fellow with a red nose and white hair, seemed utterly dejected, while the woman, a little roundabout, stout creature with shining cheeks, looked at the agent who had arrested them with defiant eyes.

"What is it? What is it, Hochedur?"

The rural policeman made his deposition. He had gone out that morning at his usual time in order to patrol his beat from the forest of Champieux as far as the bounderies of Argenteuil. He had not noticed anything unusual in the country except that it was a fine day and that the wheat was doing well, when the son of old Bredel, who was going over his vines a second time, called out to him: "Here, Daddy Hochedur, go and have a look into the skirts of the wood, in the first thicket, and you'll catch a pair of pigeons there who must be a hundred and thirty years old between them!"

He went in the direction that had been indicated to him and had gone into the thicket. There he had heard words and gasps which made him suspect a flagrant breach of morality. Advancing, therefore, on his hands and knees as if to surprise a poacher, he had arrested this couple at the very moment when they were going to abandon themselves to their natural instincts.

The mayor looked at the culprits in astonishment, for the man was certainly sixty and the woman fifty-five at least. So he began to question them, beginning with the man, who replied in such a weak voice that he could scarcely be heard.

"What is your name?"

"Nicolas Beaurain."

"Your occupation?"

"Haberdasher in the Rue des Martyrs, in Paris."

"What were you doing in the wood?"

The haberdasher remained silent, with his eyes on his fat stomach and his hands resting on his thighs, and the mayor continued:

"Do you deny what the officer of the municipal authorities states?"

"No, monsieur."

"So you confess it?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"What have you to say in your defense?"

"Nothing, monsieur."

"Where did you meet the partner in your misdemeanor?"

"She is my wife, monsieur."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then—then—you do not live together in Paris?"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, but we are living together!"

"But in that case you must be mad, altogether mad, my dear sir, to get caught like that in the country at ten o'clock in the morning."

The haberdasher seemed ready to cry with shame, and he murmured: "It was she who enticed me! I told her it was stupid, but when a woman has got a thing into her head, you know, you cannot get it out."

The mayor, who liked open speaking, smiled and replied:

"In your case the contrary ought to have happened. You would not be here if she had had the idea only in her head."

Then M. Beaurain was seized with rage and, turning to his wife, he said: "Do you see to what you have brought us with your poetry? And now we shall have to go before the courts at our age for a breach of morals! And we shall have to shut up the shop, sell our good will and go to some other neighborhood! That's what it has come to!"

Mme Beaurain got up and, without looking at her husband, explained herself without any embarrassment, without useless modesty and almost without hesitation.

"Of course, monsieur, I know that we have made ourselves ridiculous. Will you allow me to plead my case like an advocate, or rather like a poor woman? And I hope that you will be kind enough to send us home and to spare us the disgrace of a prosecution.

"Years ago, when I was young, I made Monsieur Beaurain's acquaintance on Sunday in this neighborhood. He was employed in a draper's shop, and I was a saleswoman in a ready-made clothing establishment. I remember it as if it were yesterday. I used to come and spend Sundays here occasionally with a friend of mine, Rose Levêque, with whom I lived in the Rue Pigalle, and Rose had a sweetheart, while I had not. He used to bring us here, and one Saturday he told me, laughing, that he should bring a friend with him the next day. I quite understood what he meant, but I replied that it would be no good, for I was virtuous, monsieur.

"The next day we met Monsieur Beaurain at the railway station. In those days he was good looking, but I had made up my mind not to yield to him, and I did not yield. Well, we arrived at Bezons. It was a lovely day, the sort of day that tickles your heart. When it is fine

even now, just as it used to be formerly, I grow quite foolish, and when I am in the country I utterly lose my head. The verdure, the swallows flying so swiftly, the smell of the grass, the scarlet poppies, the daisies, all that makes me quite excited! It is like champagne when one is not used to it!

"Well, it was lovely weather, warm and bright, and it seemed to penetrate into your body by your eyes when you looked and by your mouth when you breathed. Rose and Simon hugged and kissed each other every minute, and that gave me something to look at! Monsieur Beaurain and I walked behind them without speaking much, for when people do not know each other well they cannot find much to talk about. He looked timid, and I liked to see his embarrassment. At last we got to the little wood; it was as cool as in a bath there, and we all four sat down. Rose and her lover joked me because I looked rather stern, but you will understand that I could not be otherwise. And then they began to kiss and hug again without putting and more restraint upon themselves than if we had not been there. Then they whispered together and got up and went off among the trees without saying a word. You may fancy how I felt, alone with this young fellow whom I saw for the first time. I felt so confused at seeing them go that it gave me courage and I began to talk. I asked him what his business was, and he said he was a linen draper's assistant, as I told you just now. We talked for a few minutes, and that made him bold, and he wanted to take liberties with me, but I told him sharply to keep his own place. Is not that true, Monsieur Beaurain?"

M. Beaurain, who was looking at his feet in confusion, did not reply, and she continued: "Then he saw that I was virtuous and he began to make love to me nicely, like an honorable man, and from that time he came every Sunday, for he was very much in love with me. I was very fond of him also, very fond of him! He was a good-looking fellow formerly, and in short he married me the next September, and we started business in the Rue des Martyrs.

"It was a hard struggle for some years, monsieur. Business did not prosper, and we could not afford many country excursions, and then we became unaccustomed to them. One has other things in one's head and thinks more of the cashbox than of pretty speeches when one is in business. We were growing old by degrees without perceiving it, like quiet people who do not think much about love. But one does not regret anything as long as one does not notice what one has lost.

"And after that, monsieur, business went better, and we became tranquil as to the future! Then, you see, I do not exactly know what passed within me—no, I really do not know—but I began to dream like a little boarding-school girl. The sight of the little carts full of

flowers which are peddled about the streets made me cry; the smell of violets sought me out in my easy chair, behind my cashbox, and made my heart beat! Then I used to get up and go onto the doorstep to look at the blue sky between the roofs. When one looks at the sky from a street it seems like a river flowing over Paris, winding as it goes, and the swallows pass to and fro in it like fish. These sort of things are very stupid at my age! But what can one do, monsieur, when one has worked all one's life? A moment comes in which one perceives that one could have done something else, and then one regrets. Oh yes! One feels great regret! Just think that for twenty years I might have gone and had kisses in the wood, like other women. I used to think how delightful it would be to lie under the trees loving someone! And I thought of it every day and every night! I dreamed of the moonlight on the water, until I felt inclined to drown myself.

"I did not venture to speak to Monsieur Beaurain about this at first. I knew that he would make fun of me and send me back to sell my needles and cotton! And then, to speak the truth, Monsieur Beaurain never said much to me, but when I looked in the glass I also understood quite well that I also no longer appealed to anyone!

"Well, I made up my mind, and I proposed an excursion into the country to him to the place where we had first become acquainted. He agreed without any distrust, and we arrived here this morning about nine o'clock.

"I felt quite young again when I got among the corn, for a woman's heart never grows old! And really I no longer saw my husband as he is at present, but just like he was formerly! That I will swear to you, monsieur. As true as I am standing here, I was intoxicated. I began to kiss him, and he was more surprised than if I had tried to murder him. He kept saying to me: 'Why, you must be mad this morning! What is the matter with you?' I did not listen to him; I only listened to my own heart, and I made him come into the wood with me. There is the story. I have spoken the truth, Monsieur le Maire, the whole truth."

The mayor was a sensible man. He rose from his chair, smiled and said: "Go in peace, madame, and sin no more—under the trees."

THE MARQUIS DE FUMEROL

ROGER DE TOUMEVILLE was sitting astride a chair in the midst of his friends and talking; he held a cigar in his hand and from time to time took a whiff and blew out a small cloud of smoke.

"We were at dinner when a letter was brought in, and my father opened it. You know my father who thinks that he is king of France *ad interim*. I call him Don Quixote, because for twelve years he has been running a tilt against the windmill of the Republic without quite knowing whether it was in the name of Bourbon or of Orléans. At present he is holding the lance in the name of Orléans alone, because there is nobody else left. In any case, he thinks himself the first gentleman in France, the best known, the most influential, the head of the party, and as he is an irremovable senator, he thinks that the neighboring kings' thrones are very insecure.

"As for my mother, she is my father's inspiration, the soul of the kingdom and of religion, the right arm of God on earth and the scourge of evil thinkers.

"Well, this letter was brought in while we were at dinner. My father opened and read it, and then he said to my mother: 'Your brother is dying.' She grew very pale. My uncle was scarcely ever mentioned in the house, and I did not know him at all; all I knew from public talk was that he had led and was still leading the life of a buffoon. After having spent his fortune with an incalculable number of women, he had only retained two mistresses, with whom he was living in small apartments in the Rue des Martyrs.

"An ex-peer of France and ex-colonel of cavalry, it was said that he believed in neither God nor devil. Having no faith, therefore, in a future life, he had abused this present life in every way and had become a living wound to my mother's heart.

"'Give me that letter, Paul,' she said, and when she had read it I asked for it in my turn. Here it is:

"MONSIEUR LE COMTE: I think I ought to let you know that your brother-in-law, Count Fumerol, is going to die. Perhaps you would make preparations and not forget that I told you.

"Your servant, MÉLANI."

"'We must think,' my father murmured. 'In my position I ought to watch over your brother's last moments.'

"My mother continued: 'I will send for Abbé Poivron and ask his advice, and then I will go to my brother's with him and Roger. Stop here, Paul, for you must not compromise yourself, but a woman can and ought to do these things. For a politician in your position, it is another matter. It would be a fine thing for one of your opponents to be able to bring one of your most laudable actions up against you.'

"'You are right!' my father said. 'Do as you think best, my dear wife.'

"A quarter of an hour later the Abbé Poivron came into the drawing

room, and the situation was explained to him, analyzed and discussed in all its bearings. If the Marquis de Fumerol, one of the greatest names in France, were to die without the succor of religion it would assuredly be a terrible blow to the nobility in general, to the Count de Toumeville in particular, and the freethinkers would be triumphant. The evilly disposed newspapers would sing songs of victory for six months; my mother's name would be dragged through the mire and brought into the slander of socialistic journals and my father's would be bespattered. It was impossible that such a thing should occur.

"A crusade was therefore immediately decided upon, which was to be led by the Abbé Poivron, a little fat, clean, slightly scented priest, the faithful vicar of a large church in a rich and noble quarter.

"The landau was ordered, and we three started, my mother, the curé and I, to administer the last sacraments to my uncle.

"It had been decided that first of all we should see Madame Mélanie who had written the letter and who was most likely the porter's wife or my uncle's servant, and I got down as a scout in front of a seven-storied house and went into a dark passage, where I had great difficulty in finding the porter's den. He looked at me distrustfully, and I said:

"'Madame Mélanie, if you please.'

"'Don't know her!'

"'But I have received a letter from her.'

"'That may be, but I don't know her. Are you asking for some kept woman?'

"'No, a servant probably. She wrote me about a place.'

"'A servant—a servant? Perhaps it is the marquis's. Go and see, the fifth story on the left.'

"As soon as he found I was not asking for a kept woman he became more friendly and came as far as the passage with me. He was a tall thin man with white whiskers, the manners of a beadle, and majestic in movement.

"I climbed up a long spiral staircase whose balusters I did not venture to touch, and I gave three discreet knocks at the left-hand door on the fifth story. It opened immediately, and an enormous dirty woman appeared before me, who barred the entrance with her open arms which she placed upon the two doorposts and grumbled out:

"'What do you want?'

"'Are you Madame Mélanie?'

"'Yes.'

"'I am the Viscount de Toumeville.'

"'Ah! All right! Come in.'

"'Well, the fact is, my mother is downstairs with a priest.'

"'Oh! All right; go and bring them up, but take care of the porter.'

"I went downstairs and came up again with my mother who was followed by the abbé, and I fancied that I heard other footsteps behind us. As soon as we were in the kitchen, Mélanie offered us chairs, and we all four sat down to deliberate.

"'Is he very ill?' my mother asked.

"'Oh yes, madame; he will not be here long.'

"'Does he seem disposed to receive a visit from a priest?'

"'Oh! I do not think so.'

"'Can I see him?'

"'Well—yes—madame—only—only—those young ladies are with him.'

"'What young ladies?'

"'Why—why—his lady friends, of course.'

"'Oh!' Mamma had grown scarlet, and the Abbé Poivron had lowered his eyes.

"The affair began to amuse me, and I said: 'Suppose I go in first? I shall see how he receives me, and perhaps I shall be able to prepare his heart for you.'

"My mother, who did not suspect any trick, replied: 'Yes, go, my dear.'

"But a woman's voice cried out: 'Mélanie!'

"The fat servant ran out and said: 'What do you want, Mademoiselle Claire?'

"'The omelet, quickly.'

"'In a minute, mademoiselle.' And coming back to us, she explained this summons.

"'They ordered a cheese omelet at two o'clock as a slight collation.' And immediately she began to break eggs into a salad bowl and began to whip them vigorously, while I went out onto the landing and pulled the bell so as to announce my official arrival. Mélanie opened the door to me and made me sit down in an anteroom while she went to tell my uncle that I had come. Then she came back and asked me to go in, while the abbé hid behind the door so that he might appear at the first sign.

"I was certainly very much surprised at seeing my uncle, for he was very handsome, very solemn and very elegant—the old rake.

"Sitting, almost lying, in a large armchair, his legs wrapped in blankets, with his hands, his long white hands, over the arms of the chair, he was waiting for death with biblical dignity. His white beard fell on his chest, and his hair which was also white mingled with it on his cheeks.

"Standing behind his armchair as if to defend him against me were

two young women, two stout young women, who looked at me with the bold eyes of prostitutes. In their petticoats and morning wrappers, with bare arms, with coal-black hair twisted up onto the napes of their necks, with embroidered oriental slippers which showed their ankles and silk stockings, they looked like the immoral figures of some symbolical painting by the side of the dying man. Between the easy chair and the bed there was a table covered with a white cloth on which two plates, two glasses, two forks and two knives were waiting for the cheese omelet which had been ordered some time before of Mélani.

"My uncle said in a weak, almost breathless, but clear voice: 'Good morning, my child; it is rather late in the day to come to see me; our acquaintanceship will not last long.'

"I stammered out: 'It was not my fault, Uncle,' and he replied: 'No; I know that. It is your father's and mother's fault more than yours. How are they?'

"'Pretty well, thank you. When they heard that you were ill they sent me to ask after you.'

"'Ah! Why did they not come themselves?'

"I looked up at the two girls and said gently: 'It is not their fault if they could not come, Uncle. But it would be difficult for my father and impossible for my mother to come in here.' The old man did not reply but raised his hand toward mine, and I took the pale, cold hand and kept it in my own.

"The door opened; Mélani came in with the omelet and put it on the table, and the two girls immediately sat down in front of their plates and began to eat without taking their eyes off me.

"Then I said: 'Uncle, it would be a great pleasure for my mother to embrace you.'

"'I also,' he murmured, 'should like—' He said no more, and I could think of nothing to propose to him, and nothing more was heard except the noise of the plates and the slight sound of eating mouths.

"Now the abbé, who was listening behind the door, seeing our embarrassment and thinking we had won the game, thought the time had come to interpose and showed himself. My uncle was so stupefied at that apparition that at first he remained motionless; then he opened his mouth as if he meant to swallow up the priest and cried out in a strong, deep, furious voice: 'What are you doing here?'

"The abbé, who was used to difficult situations, came forward, murmuring: 'I have come in your sister's name, Monsieur le Marquis; she has sent me—she would be so happy, monsieur——'

"But the marquis was not listening. Raising one hand, he pointed to the door with a proud and tragic gesture and said angrily and gasping

for breath: 'Leave this room—go out—robber of souls. Go out from here, you violator of consciences! Go out from here, you picklock of dying men's doors!'

"The abbé went backward, and I, too, went to the door, beating a retreat with him, and the two little women who were avenged got up, leaving their omelet half eaten, and stood on either side of my uncle's armchair, putting their hands on his arms to calm him and to protect him against the criminal enterprises of the family and of religion.

"The abbé and I rejoined my mother in the kitchen, and Mélanie again offered us chairs. 'I knew quite well that you would fail that way; we must try some other means, otherwise he will escape us.' And we began deliberating afresh, my mother being of one opinion and the abbé of another, while I held a third.

"We had been discussing the matter in a low voice for half an hour, perhaps, when a great noise of furniture being moved and of cries uttered by my uncle, more vehement and terrible even than the former had been, made us all jump up.

"Through the doors and walls we could hear him shouting: 'Go out—out—rascals—humbugs; get out, scoundrels—get out—get out!'

"Mélanie rushed in but came back immediately to call me to help her, and I hastened in. Opposite to my uncle who was terribly excited by anger, almost standing up and vociferating, two men, one behind the other, seemed to be waiting till he should be dead with rage.

"By his long, ridiculous coat, his pointed English shoes, by his manners—like those of a tutor out of a situation—by his high collar, white necktie and straight hair, by his humble face, I immediately recognized the first as a Protestant minister.

"The second was the porter of the house who belonged to the Reformed religion and had followed us. Having known of our defeat, he had gone to fetch his own pastor in hope of a better fate. My uncle seemed mad with rage! If the sight of the Catholic priest, of the priest of his ancestors, had irritated the Marquis de Fumerol, who had become a freethinker, the sight of his porter's minister made him altogether beside himself. I therefore took the two men by the arm and threw them out of the room so violently that they fell up against each other twice between the two doors which led to the staircase; then I disappeared in my turn and returned to the kitchen, which was our headquarters, in order to take counsel with my mother and the abbé.

"But Mélanie came back in terror, sobbing out: 'He is dying—he is dying. Come immediately—he is dying.'

"My mother rushed out. My uncle had fallen onto the carpet, full length along the floor, and did not move. I fancy he was already dead. My mother was superb at that moment! She went straight up to the

two girls who were kneeling by the body and trying to raise it up and, pointing to the door with irresistible authority, dignity and majesty, she said: 'Now it is for you to go out.'

"And they went out without a protest and without saying a word. I must add that I was getting ready to turn them out as uncereemoniously as I had done the parson and the porter.

"Then the Abbé Poivron administered extreme unction to my uncle with all the customary prayers and remitted all his sins, while my mother sobbed, kneeling near her brother. Suddenly, however, she exclaimed: 'He recognized me; he pressed my hand; I am sure he recognized me and thanked me! O God, what happiness!'

"Poor Mamma! If she had known or guessed to whom those thanks ought to have been addressed!

"They laid my uncle on his bed; he was certainly dead that time.

"'Madame,' Mélani said, 'we have no sheets to bury him in; all the linen belongs to those two young ladies,' and when I looked at the omelet which they had not finished, I felt inclined to laugh and to cry at the same time. There are some strange moments and some strange sensations in life occasionally!

"We gave my uncle a magnificent funeral with five speeches at the grave. Baron de Croiselles, the senator, showed in admirable terms that God always returns victorious into well-born souls which have gone astray for a moment. All the members of the Royalist and Catholic party followed the funeral procession with triumphant enthusiasm, speaking of that beautiful death after a somewhat restless life."

Viscount Roger ceased speaking, and those around him laughed. Then somebody said: "Bah! That is the story of all conversions *in extremis*."

SAVED

THE LITTLE MARQUISE DE RENNEDON came rushing in like a ball through the window. She began to laugh before she spoke, to laugh till she cried, like she had done a month previously, when she had told her friend that she had betrayed the marquis in order to have her revenge, but only once, just because he was really too stupid and too jealous.

The little Baroness de Grangerie had thrown the book which she was reading onto the sofa and looked at Annette curiously. She was already laughing herself, and at last she asked:

"What have you been doing now?"

"Oh, my dear!—my dear! It is too funny—too funny. Just fancy—I am saved!—saved!—saved!"

"How do you mean, saved?"

"Yes, saved!"

"From what?"

"From my husband, my dear, saved! Delivered! free! free! free!"

"How free? In what?"

"In what? Divorce! yes, a divorce! I have my divorce!"

"You are divorced?"

"No, not yet; how stupid you are! One does not get divorced in three hours! But I have my proofs that he has deceived me—caught in the very act—just think!—in the very act. I have got him tight."

"Oh, do tell me all about it! So he has deceived you?"

"Yes, that is to say no—yes and no—I do not know. At any rate I have proofs, and that is the chief thing."

"How did you manage it?"

"How did I manage it? This is how! I have been energetic, very energetic. For the last three months he has been odious, altogether odious, brutal, coarse, a despot—in one word, vile. So I said to myself: This cannot last, I must have a divorce! But how?—for it is not very easy. I tried to make him beat me, but he would not. He vexed me from morning till night, made me go out when I did not wish to and to remain at home when I wanted to dine out; he made my life unbearable for me from one week's end to the other, but he never struck me.

"Then I tried to find out whether he had a mistress. Yes, he had one, but he took a thousand precautions in going to see her, and they could never be caught together. Guess what I did then?"

"I cannot guess."

"Oh! you could never guess. I asked my brother to procure me a photograph of the creature."

"Of your husband's mistress?"

"Yes. It cost Jaques fifteen louis,¹ the price of an evening, from seven o'clock till midnight, including a dinner, at three louis an hour, and he obtained the photograph into the bargain."

"It appears to me that he might have obtained it anyhow by means of some artifice and without—without—without being obliged to take the original at the same time."

"Oh! she is pretty, and Jaques did not mind the least. And then I wanted some details about her, physical details about her figure, her breast, her complexion, a thousand things, in fact."

"I do not understand you."

¹ \$60.

"You shall see. When I had learned all that I wanted to know I went to a—how shall I put it?—to a man of business—you know—one of those men who transact business of all sorts—agents of—of—of publicity and complicity—one of those men—well, you understand what I mean."

"Pretty nearly, I think. And what did you say to him?"

"I said to him, showing the photograph of Clarisse (her name is Clarisse): 'Monsieur, I want a lady's maid who resembles this photograph. I require one who is pretty, elegant, neat and sharp. I will pay her whatever is necessary, and if it costs me ten thousand francs,² so much the worse. I shall not require her for more than three months.'

"The man looked extremely astonished and said: 'Do you require a maid of an irreproachable character, madame?' I blushed and stammered: 'Yes, of course, for honesty.' He continued: 'And—then—as regards morals? I did not venture to reply, so I only made a sign with my head which signified *No*. Then suddenly I comprehended that he had a horrible suspicion and, losing my presence of mind, I exclaimed: 'Oh! monsieur—it is for my husband, in order that I may surprise him.'

"Then the man began to laugh, and from his looks I gathered that I had regained his esteem. He even thought I was brave, and I would willingly have made a bet that at that moment he was longing to shake hands with me. However, he said to me: 'In a week, madame, I shall have what you require; I will answer for my success, and you shall not pay me until I have succeeded. So this is a photograph of your husband's mistress?'

"Yes, monsieur."

"A handsome woman, and not too stout. And what scent?"

"I did not understand and repeated: 'What scent?'

"He smiled: 'Yes, madame, perfume is essential in tempting a man, for it unconsciously brings to his mind certain reminiscences which dispose him to action; the perfume creates an obscure confusion in his mind and disturbs and energizes him by recalling his pleasures to him. You must also try to find out what your husband is in the habit of eating when he dines with his lady, and you might give him the same dishes the day you catch him. Oh! we have got him, madame, we have got him.'

"I went away delighted, for here I had lighted on a very intelligent man.

"Three days later I saw a tall dark girl arrive at my house; she was very handsome, and her looks were modest and bold at the same time, the peculiar look of a female rake. She behaved very properly toward

² \$2000.

me, and as I did not exactly know what she was I called her *mademoiselle*, but she said immediately: 'Oh! pray, madame, only call me Rose.' And she began to talk.

"Well, Rose, you know why you have come here?"

"I can guess it, madame."

"Very good, my girl—and that will not be too much bother for you?"

"Oh! madame, this will be the eighth divorce that I shall have caused; I am used to it."

"Why, that is capital. Will it take you long to succeed?"

"Oh! madame, that depends entirely on Monsieur's temperament. When I have seen Monsieur for five minutes alone I shall be able to tell you exactly."

"You will see him soon, my child, but I must tell you that he is not handsome."

"That does not matter to me, madame. I have already separated some very ugly ones. But I must ask you, madame, whether you have discovered his favorite perfume?"

"Yes, Rose—*verbena*."

"So much the better, madame, for I am also very fond of that scent! Can you also tell me, madame, whether Monsieur's mistress wears silk underclothing and nightdresses?"

"No, my child, *cambric* and lace."

"Oh! then she is altogether of superior station, for silk underclothing is getting quite common."

"What you say is quite true!"

"Well, madame, I will enter your service." And so as a matter of fact she did immediately, and as if she had done nothing else all her life.

"An hour later my husband came home. Rose did not even raise her eyes to him, but he raised his eyes to her. She already smelled strongly of *verbena*. In five minutes she left the room, and he immediately asked me: 'Who is that girl?'"

"Why—my new lady's maid."

"Where did you pick her up?"

"Baroness de Grangerie got her for me with the best references."

"Ah! she is rather pretty!"

"Do you think so?"

"Why, yes—for a lady's maid."

"I was delighted, for I felt that he was already biting, and that same evening Rose said to me: 'I can now promise you that it will not take more than a fortnight. Monsieur is very easily caught!'"

"Ah! you have tried already?"

"No, madame, he only asked what my name was, so that he might hear what my voice was like."

"Very well, my dear Rose. Get on as quick as you can."

"Do not be alarmed, madame; I shall only resist long enough not to make myself depreciated."

"At the end of the week my husband scarcely ever went out; I saw him roaming about the house the whole afternoon, and what was most significant in the matter was that he no longer prevented me from going out. And I, I was out of doors nearly the whole day long—in order—in order to leave him at liberty."

"On the ninth day, while Rose was undressing me, she said to me with a timid air: 'It happened this morning, madame.'"

"I was rather surprised, or rather overcome even, not at the part itself but at the way in which she told me, and I stammered out: 'And—and—it went off well?'"

"Oh yes, very well, madame. For the last three days he has been pressing me, but I did not wish matters to proceed too quickly. You will tell me when you want us to be caught, madame."

"Yes, certainly. Here! Let us say Thursday."

"Very well, madame, I shall grant nothing more till then, so as to keep Monsieur on the alert."

"You are sure not to fail?"

"Oh, quite sure, madame. I will excite him, so as to make him be there at the very moment which you may appoint."

"Let us say five o'clock then."

"Very well, madame, and where?"

"Well—in my bedroom."

"Very good, madame, in your bedroom."

"You will understand what I did then, my dear. I went and fetched Mamma and Pappa first of all and then my uncle d'Orvelin, the president, and Monsieur Raplet, the judge, my husband's friend. I had not told them what I was going to show them, but I made them all go on tiptoe as far as the door of my room. I waited till five o'clock exactly, and oh, how my heart beat! I had made the porter come upstairs as well, so as to have an additional witness! And then—and then at the moment when the clock began to strike I opened the door wide. Ah! ah! ah! Here he was, evidently—it was quite evident, my dear. Oh, what a head! If you had only seen his head! And he turned round, the idiot! Oh! how funny he looked—I laughed, I laughed. And papa was angry and wanted to give my husband a beating. And the porter, a good servant, helped him to dress himself before us—before us. He buttoned his braces for him—what a joke it was! As for Rose, she was

perfect, absolutely perfect. She cried—oh! she cried very well. She is an invaluable girl. If you ever want her, don't forget!

"And here I am. I came immediately to tell you of the affair directly. I am free. Long live divorce!"

And she began to dance in the middle of the drawing room, while the little baroness, who was thoughtful and put out, said:

"Why did you not invite me to see it?"

THE DEVIL

THE PEASANT WAS STANDING OPPOSITE the doctor, by the bedside of the dying old woman, and she, calmly resigned and quite lucid, looked at them and listened to their talking. She was going to die and she did not rebel at it, for her life was over—she was ninety-two.

The July sun streamed in at the window and through the open door and cast its hot flames onto the uneven brown clay floor which had been stamped down by four generations of clodhoppers. The smell of the fields came in also, driven by the brisk wind and parched by the noontide heat. The grasshoppers chirped themselves hoarse, filling the air with their shrill noise, like that of the wooden crickets which are sold to children at fair time.

The doctor raised his voice and said: "Honoré, you cannot leave your mother in this state; she may die at any moment." And the peasant, in great distress, replied: "But I must get in my wheat, for it has been lying on the ground a long time, and the weather is just right for it; what do you say about it, Mother?" And the dying woman, still possessed by her Norman avariciousness, replied yes with her eyes and her forehead and so urged her son to get in his wheat and to leave her to die alone. But the doctor got angry and, stamping his foot, he said: "You are no better than a brute; do you hear? And I will not allow you to do it. Do you understand? And if you must get in your wheat today, go and fetch Rapet's wife and make her look after your mother. I *will* have it. And if you do not obey me I will let you die like a dog when you are ill in your turn; do you hear me?"

The peasant, a tall thin fellow with slow movements who was tormented by indecision, by his fear of the doctor and his keen love for saving, hesitated, calculated and stammered out: "How much does La Rapet charge for attending sick people?"

"How should I know?" the doctor cried. "That depends upon how long she is wanted for. Settle it with her, by Jove! But I want her to be here within an hour; do you hear?"

So the man made up his mind. "I will go for her," he replied; "don't get angry, Doctor." And the latter left, calling out as he went: "Take care, you know, for I do not joke when I am angry!" And as soon as they were alone the peasant turned to his mother and said in a resigned voice: "I will go and fetch La Rapet, as the man will have it. Don't go off while I am away."

And he went out in his turn.

La Rapet, who was an old washerwoman, watched the dead and the dying of the neighborhood, and then as soon as she had sewn her customers into that linen cloth from which they would emerge no more, she went and took up her irons to smooth the linen of the living. Wrinkled like a last year's apple, spiteful, envious, avaricious with a phenomenal avarice, bent double, as if she had been broken in half across the loins by the constant movement of the iron over the linen, one might have said that she had a kind of monstrous and cynical affection for a death struggle. She never spoke of anything but of the people she had seen die, of the various kinds of deaths at which she had been present, and she related, with the greatest minuteness, details which were always the same, just like a sportsman talks of his shots.

When Honoré Bontemps entered her cottage he found her preparing the starch for the collars of the village women, and he said: "Good evening; I hope you are pretty well, Mother Rapet."

She turned her head round to look at him and said: "Fairly well, fairly well, and you?"

"Oh, as for me, I am as well as I could wish, but my mother is very sick."

"Your mother?"

"Yes, my mother!"

"What's the matter with her?"

"She is going to turn up her toes; that's what's the matter with her!"

The old woman took her hands out of the water and asked with sudden sympathy: "Is she as bad as all that?"

"The doctor says she will not last till morning."

"Then she certainly is very bad!" Honoré hesitated, for he wanted to make a few preliminary remarks before coming to his proposal, but as he could hit upon nothing, he made up his mind suddenly.

"How much are you going to ask to stop with her till the end? You know that I am not rich, and I cannot even afford to keep a servant girl. It is just that which has brought my poor mother to this state, too much work and fatigue! She used to work for ten, in spite of her ninety-two years. You don't find any made of that stuff nowadays!"

La Rapet answered gravely: "There are two prices: forty sous by day and three francs by night for the rich, and twenty sous by day and forty by night for the others. You shall pay me the twenty and forty." But the peasant reflected, for he knew his mother well. He knew how tenacious of life, how vigorous and unyielding she was. He knew, too, that she might last another week, in spite of the doctor's opinion, and so he said resolutely: "No, I would rather you would fix a price until the end. I will take my chance one way or the other. The doctor says she will die very soon. If that happens, so much the better for you and so much the worse for me, but if she holds out till tomorrow or longer, so much the better for me and so much the worse for you!"

The nurse looked at the man in astonishment, for she had never treated a death as a speculative job, and she hesitated, tempted by the idea of the possible gain. But almost immediately she suspected that he wanted to juggle her. "I can say nothing until I have seen your mother," she replied.

"Then come with me and see her."

She washed her hands and went with him immediately. They did not speak on the road; she walked with short, hasty steps, while he strode on with his long legs, as if he were crossing a brook at every step. The cows lying down in the fields, overcome by the heat, raised their heads heavily and lowed feebly at the two passers-by, as if to ask them for some green grass.

When they got near the house Honoré Bontemps murmured: "Suppose it is all over?" And the unconscious wish that it might be so showed itself in the sound of his voice.

But the old woman was not dead. She was lying on her back on her wretched bed, her hands covered with a pink cotton counterpane, horribly thin, knotty paws, like some strange animal's or like crabs' claws, hands closed by rheumatism, fatigue and the work of nearly a century which she had accomplished.

La Rapet went up to the bed and looked at the dying woman, felt her pulse, tapped her on the chest, listened to her breathing and asked her questions so as to hear her speak; then, having looked at her for some time longer, she went out of the room, followed by Honoré. His decided opinion was that the old woman would not last out the night, and he asked: "Well?" And the sick nurse replied: "Well, she may last two days, perhaps three. You will have to give me six francs, everything included."

"Six francs! Six francs!" he shouted. "Are you out of your mind? I tell you that she cannot last more than five or six hours!" And they disputed angrily for some time, but as the nurse said she would go home as the time was slipping away, and as his wheat would not

come to the farmyard of its own accord, he agreed to her terms at last.

"Very well then, that is settled; six francs, including everything, until the corpse is taken out."

"That is settled, six francs."

And he went away with long strides to the wheat which was lying on the ground under the hot sun which ripens the grain, while the sick nurse returned to the house.

She had brought some work with her, for she worked without stopping by the side of the dead and dying, sometimes for herself, sometimes for the family who employed her as seamstress also, paying her rather more in that capacity. Suddenly she asked:

"Have you received the last sacrament, Mother Bontemps?"

The old peasant woman said no with her head, and La Rapet, who was very devout, got up quickly. "Good heavens, is it possible? I will go and fetch the curé," and she rushed off to the parsonage so quickly that the urchins in the street thought some accident had happened when they saw her trotting off like that.

The priest came immediately in his surplice, preceded by a choirboy, who rang a bell to announce the passage of the Host through the parched and quiet country. Some men, working at a distance took off their large hats and remained motionless until the white vestment had disappeared behind some farm buildings; the women who were making up the sheaves stood up to make the sign of the cross; the frightened black hens ran away along the ditch until they reached a well-known hole through which they suddenly disappeared, while a foal, which was tied up in a meadow, took fright at the sight of the surplice and began to gallop round at the length of its rope, kicking violently. The choirboy, in his red cassock, walked quickly, and the priest, the square biretta on his bowed head, followed him, muttering some prayers. Last of all came La Rapet, bent almost double, as if she wished to prostrate herself; she walked with folded hands, as if she were in church.

Honoré saw them pass in the distance, and he asked: "Where is our priest going to?" And his man, who was more acute, replied: "He is taking the sacrament to your mother, of course!"

The peasant was not surprised and said: "That is quite possible," and went on with his work.

Mother Bontemps confessed, received absolution and extreme unction, and the priest took his departure, leaving the two women alone in the suffocating cottage. La Rapet began to look at the dying woman and to ask herself whether it could last much longer.

The day was on the wane, and a cooler air came in stronger puffs, making a view of Epinal, which was fastened to the wall by two pins,

flap up and down. The scanty window curtains, which had formerly been white but were now yellow and covered with flyspecks, looked as if they were going to fly off and seemed to struggle to get away, like the old woman's soul.

Lying motionless, with her eyes open, the old mother seemed to await the death which was so near and which yet delayed its coming, with perfect indifference. Her short breath whistled in her throat. It would stop altogether soon, and there would be one woman less in the world, one whom nobody would regret.

At nightfall Honoré returned, and when he went up to the bed and saw that his mother was still alive he asked: "How is she?" just as he had done formerly when she had been sick. Then he sent La Rapet away, saying to her: "Tomorrow morning at five o'clock without fail." And she replied: "Tomorrow at five o'clock."

She came at daybreak and found Honoré eating his soup, which he had made himself, before going to work.

"Well, is your mother dead?" asked the nurse.

"She is rather better, on the contrary," he replied with a malignant look out of the corners of his eyes. Then he went out.

La Rapet was seized with anxiety and went up to the dying woman, who was in the same state, lethargic and impassive, her eyes open and her hands clutching the counterpane. The nurse perceived that this might go on thus for two days, four days, eight days, even, and her avaricious mind was seized with fear. She was excited to fury against the cunning fellow who had tricked her and against the woman who would not die.

Nevertheless, she began to sew and waited with her eyes fixed on the wrinkled face of Mother Bontemps. When Honoré returned to breakfast he seemed quite satisfied and even in a bantering humor, for he was carrying in his wheat under very favorable circumstances.

La Rapet was getting exasperated; every passing minute now seemed to her so much time and money stolen from her. She felt a mad inclination to choke this old ass, this headstrong old fool, this obstinate old wretch—to stop that short, rapid breath, which was robbing her of her time and money, by squeezing her throat a little. But then she reflected on the danger of doing so, and other thoughts came into her head, so she went up to the bed and said to her: "Have you ever seen the devil?"

Mother Bontemps whispered: "No."

Then the sick nurse began to talk and to tell her tales likely to terrify her weak and dying mind. "Some minutes before one dies the devil appears," she said, "to all. He has a broom in his hand, a saucepan on his head, and he utters loud cries. When anybody has seen

him all is over, and that person has only a few moments longer to live"; and she enumerated all those to whom the devil had appeared that year: Josephine Loisel, Eulalie Ratier, Sophie Padagnau, Séraphine Gros pied.

Mother Bontemps, who was at last most disturbed in mind, moved about, wrung her hands and tried to turn her head to look at the other end of the room. Suddenly La Rapet disappeared at the foot of the bed. She took a sheet out of the cupboard and wrapped herself up in it; then she put the iron pot onto her head so that its three short, bent feet rose up like horns, took a broom in her right hand and a tin pail in her left, which she threw up suddenly so that it might fall to the ground noisily.

Certainly when it came down it made a terrible noise. Then, climbing onto a chair, the nurse showed herself, gesticulating and uttering shrill cries into the pot which covered her face, while she menaced the old peasant woman, who was nearly dead, with her broom.

Terrified, with a mad look on her face, the dying woman made a superhuman effort to get up and escape; she even got her shoulders and chest out of bed; then she fell back with a deep sigh. All was over, and La Rapet calmly put everything back into its place; the broom into the corner by the cupboard, the sheet inside it, the pot onto the hearth, the pail onto the floor and the chair against the wall. Then with a professional air she closed the dead woman's enormous eyes, put a plate on the bed and poured some holy water into it, dipped the twig of boxwood into it and, kneeling down, she fervently repeated the prayers for the dead, which she knew by heart, as a matter of business.

When Honoré returned in the evening, he found her praying. He calculated immediately that she had made twenty sous out of him, for she had only spent three days and one night there, which made five francs altogether, instead of the six which he owed her.

THE VENUS OF BRANIZA

SOME YEARS AGO there lived in Braniza a celebrated Talmudist, renowned no less on account of his beautiful wife than for his wisdom, his learning and his fear of God. The Venus of Braniza deserved that name thoroughly; she deserved it for herself on account of her singular beauty, and even more as the wife of a man deeply versed in the Talmud, for the wives of the Jewish philosophers are, as a rule, ugly or possess some bodily defect.

The Talmud explains this in the following manner: It is well

known that marriages are made in heaven, and at the birth of a boy a divine voice calls out the name of his future wife and vice versa. But just as a good father tries to get rid of his good wares out of doors and only uses the damaged stuff at home for his children, so God bestows on the Talmudists those women whom other men would not care to have.

Well, God made an exception in the case of our Talmudist and had bestowed a Venus on him, perhaps only in order to confirm the rule by means of this exception and to make it appear less hard. This philosopher's wife was a woman who would have done honor to any king's throne or to a pedestal in any sculpture gallery. Tall, and with a wonderfully voluptuous figure, she carried a strikingly beautiful head, surrounded by thick black plaits, on her proud shoulders. Two large dark eyes languished and glowed beneath long lashes, and her beautiful hands looked as if they were carved out of ivory.

This glorious woman, who seemed to have been designed by nature to rule, to see slaves at her feet, to provide occupation for the painter's brush, the sculptor's chisel and the poet's pen, lived the life of a rare and beautiful flower shut up in a hothouse. She would sit the whole day long wrapped up in her costly furs, looking down dreamily into the street.

She had no children; her husband, the philosopher, studied and prayed and studied again from early morning until late at night; his mistress was the "Veiled Beauty," as the Talmudists call the Kabbalah. She paid no attention to her house for she was rich, and everything went of its own accord, like a clock which has only to be wound up once a week; nobody came to see her, and she never went out of the house; she sat and dreamed and brooded and—yawned.

One day when a terrible storm of thunder and lightning had spent its fury over the town and all windows had been opened in order to let the Messiah in, the Jewish Venus was sitting as usual in her comfortable easy chair, shivering in spite of her furs and thinking. Suddenly she fixed her glowing eyes on her husband who was sitting before the Talmud, swaying his body backward and forward, and said suddenly:

"Just tell me, when will Messiah, the son of David, come?"

"He will come," the philosopher replied, "when all the Jews have become either altogether virtuous or altogether vicious, says the Talmud."

"Do you believe that all the Jews will ever become virtuous?" the Venus continued.

"How am I to believe that?"

"So Messias will come when all the Jews have become vicious?"

The philosopher shrugged his shoulders and lost himself again in the labyrinth of the Talmud out of which, so it is said, only one man returned in perfect sanity. The beautiful woman at the window again looked dreamily out into the heavy rain, while her white fingers played unconsciously with the dark furs of her splendid robe.

. . .

One day the Jewish philosopher had gone to a neighboring town, where an important question of ritual was to be decided. Thanks to his learning, the question was settled sooner than he had expected, and instead of returning the next morning, as he had intended, he came back the same evening with a friend who was no less learned than himself. He got out of his carriage at his friend's house and went home on foot. He was not a little surprised when he saw his windows brilliantly illuminated and found an officer's servant comfortably smoking his pipe in front of his house.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in a friendly manner but with some curiosity, nevertheless.

"I am on guard lest the husband of the beautiful Jewess should come home unexpectedly."

"Indeed? Well, mind and keep a good lookout."

Saying this, the philosopher pretended to go away but went into the house through the garden entrance at the back. When he got into the first room he found a table laid for two, which had evidently only been left a short time previously. His wife was sitting as usual at her bedroom window, wrapped in her furs, but her cheeks were suspiciously red, and her dark eyes had not their usual languishing look but now rested on her husband with a gaze which expressed at the same time satisfaction and mockery. At that moment his foot stuck against an object on the floor which gave out a strange sound. He picked it up and examined it in the light. It was a pair of spurs.

"Who has been here with you?" asked the Talmudist.

The Jewish Venus shrugged her shoulders contemptuously but did not reply.

"Shall I tell you? The captain of hussars has been with you."

"And why should he not have been here with me?" she said, smoothing the fur on her jacket with her white hand.

"Woman! are you out of your mind?"

"I am in full possession of my senses," she replied, and a knowing smile hovered round her red voluptuous lips. "But must I not also do my part in order that Messias may come and redeem us poor Jews?"

THE RABBIT

OLD LECACHEUR appeared at the door of his house at his usual hour, between five and a quarter past five in the morning, to look after his men who were going to work.

With a red face, only half awake, his right eye open and the left nearly closed, he was buttoning his braces over his fat stomach with some difficulty, all the time looking into every corner of the farm-yard with a searching glance. The sun was darting his oblique rays through the beech trees by the side of the ditch and the apple trees outside, making the cocks crow on the dunghill and the pigeons coo on the roof. The smell of the cow stalls came through the open door, mingling in the fresh morning air with the pungent odor of the stable where the horses were neighing, with their heads turned toward the light.

As soon as his trousers were properly fastened Lecacheur came out and went first of all toward the hen house to count the morning's eggs, for he had been suspecting thefts for some time. But the servant girl ran up to him with lifted arms and cried:

"Master! Master! They have stolen a rabbit during the night."

"A rabbit?"

"Yes, master, the big gray rabbit, from the hutch on the left." Whereupon the farmer quite opened his left eye and said simply:

"I must see that."

And off he went to inspect it. The hutch had been broken open and the rabbit was gone. Then he became thoughtful, closed his left eye again, scratched his nose and after a little consideration said to the frightened girl who was standing stupidly before him:

"Go and fetch the gendarmes; say I expect them as soon as possible."

Lecacheur was mayor of the village, Pairgry-le Gras, and ruled it like a tyrant on account of his money and position. As soon as the servant had disappeared in the direction of the village, which was only about five hundred yards off, he went into the house to have his morning coffee and to discuss the matter with his wife. He found her on her knees in front of the fire, trying to get it to burn up quickly. As soon as he got to the door he said:

"Somebody has stolen the gray rabbit."

She turned round so quickly that she found herself sitting on the floor and, looking at her husband with distressed eyes, she said:

"What is it, Cacheux! Somebody has stolen a rabbit?"

"The big gray one."

She sighed. "How sad! Who can have done it?"

She was a little, thin, active, neat woman, who knew all about farming. But Lecacheur had his own ideas about the matter.

"It must be that fellow Polyte."

His wife got up suddenly and said in a furious voice:

"He did it! He did it! You need not look for anyone else. He did it! You have said it, Cacheux!"

All her peasant's fury, all her avarice, all the rage of a saving woman against the man of whom she had always been suspicious and against the girl whom she had always suspected, could be seen in the contraction of her mouth, in the wrinkles in her cheeks and in the forehead of her thin, exasperated face.

"And what have you done?" she asked.

"I have sent for the gendarmes."

This Polyte was a laborer who had been employed on the farm for a few days and had been dismissed by Lecacheur for an insolent answer. He was an old soldier and was supposed to have retained his habits of marauding and debauchery from his campaigns in Africa. He did anything for a livelihood, but whether working as a mason, a navvy, a reaper, whether he broke stones or lopped trees, he was always lazy. So he remained in no position long and had, at times, to change his neighborhood to obtain work.

From the first day that he came to the farm Lecacheur's wife had detested him, and now she was sure that he had committed the robbery.

In about half an hour the two gendarmes arrived. Brigadier Sénateur was very tall and thin, and Gendarme Lenient, short and fat. Lecacheur made them sit down and told them the affair, and then they went and saw the scene of the theft, in order to verify the fact that the hutch had been broken open and to collect all the proofs they could. When they got back to the kitchen the mistress brought in some wine, filled their glasses and asked with a distrustful look:

"Shall you catch him?"

The brigadier, who had his sword between his legs, appeared thoughtful. Certainly he was sure of taking him if he was pointed out to him, but if not, he could not himself answer for being able to discover him. After reflecting for a long time he put this simple question:

"Do you know the thief?"

And Lecacheur replied with a look of Normandy slyness in his eyes:

"As for knowing him, I do not, as I did not see him commit the

robbery. If I had seen him I should have made him eat it raw, skin and flesh, without a drop of cider to wash it down. As for saying who it is, I cannot, although I believe it is that good-for-nothing Polyte."

Then he related at length his troubles with Polyte, his leaving his service, his bad reputation, things which had been told him, accumulating insignificant and minute proofs. Then the brigadier, who had been listening very attentively while he emptied his glass and filled it again, turned to his gendarme with an indifferent air and said:

"We must go and look in the cottage of Severin's wife." At which the gendarme smiled and nodded three times.

Then Mme Lecacheur came to them and very quietly, with all a peasant's cunning, questioned the brigadier in her turn. The shepherd Severin, a simpleton, a sort of brute who had been brought up from youth among his bleating flocks and who knew of scarcely anything besides them in the world, had nevertheless preserved the peasant's instinct for saving at the bottom of his heart. For years and years he had hidden in hollow trees and crevices in the rocks all that he earned, either as shepherd or by curing the fractures of animals (for the bonesetter's secret had been handed down to him by the old shepherd whose place he took) by touch or advice, for one day he bought a small property consisting of a cottage and a field of three thousand francs.

A few months later it became known that he was going to marry a servant notorious for her bad morals, the inkeeper's servant. The young fellows said that the girl, knowing that he was pretty well off, had been to his cottage every night and had taken him, bewitched him, led him on to matrimony little by little, night by night.

And then having been to the mayor's office and to church, she lived in the house which her man had bought, while he continued to tend his flocks day and night on the plains.

And the brigadier added:

"Polyte has been sleeping with her for three weeks, for the thief has no place of his own to go to!"

The gendarme made a little joke:

"He takes the shepherd's blankets."

Mme Lecacheur, seized by a fresh access of rage, of rage increased by a married woman's anger against debauchery, exclaimed:

"It is she, I am sure. Go there. Ah! The blackguard thieves!"

But the brigadier was quite unmoved.

"A minute," he said. "Let us wait until twelve o'clock; as Polyte goes and dines there every day, I shall catch them with it under their noses."

The gendarme smiled, pleased at his chief's idea, and Lecacheur

also smiled now, for the affair of the shepherd struck him as very funny: deceived husbands are always amusing.

Twelve o'clock had just struck when the brigadier, followed by his man, knocked gently three times at the door of a small, lonely house situated at the corner of a wood, some five hundred yards from the village.

They stood close against the wall so as not to be seen from within and waited. As nobody answered, the brigadier knocked again in a minute or two. It was so quiet that the house seemed uninhabited, but Lenient, the gendarme, who had very quick ears, said that he heard somebody moving about inside. Sénateur got angry. He would not allow anyone to resist the authority of the law for a moment and, knocking at the door with the hilt of his sword, he cried out:

"Open the door in the name of the law."

As this order had no effect, he roared out:

"If you do not obey I shall smash the lock. I am the brigadier of the gendarmery, by God! Here, Lenient."

He had not finished speaking when the door opened and Sénateur saw before him a fat girl with a very red color, blowzy, with pendent breasts, big stomach and broad hips, a sort of sanguine and sensual female, the wife of the shepherd Severin. He entered the cottage.

"I have come to pay you a visit, as I want to make a little search," he said, and he looked about him. On the table there was a plate, a jug of cider and a glass half full, which provided that a meal had been going on. Two knives were lying side by side, and the shrewd gendarme winked at his superior officer.

"It smells good," the latter said.

"One might swear that it was stewed rabbit," Lenient added, much amused.

"Will you have a glass of brandy?" the peasant woman asked.

"No, thank you; I only want the skin of the rabbit that you are eating."

She pretended not to understand, but she was trembling.

"What rabbit?"

The brigadier had taken a seat and was calmly wiping his forehead.

"Come, come, you are not going to try and make us believe that you live on couch grass. What were you eating there all by yourself for your dinner?"

"I? Nothing whatever, I swear to you. A mite of butter on my bread."

"You are a novice, my good woman—a mite of butter on your bread."

You are mistaken; you ought to have said: a mite of butter on the rabbit. By God, your butter smells good! It is special butter, **extra-good** butter, butter fit for a wedding, certainly not household butter!"

The gendarme was shaking with laughter and repeated:

"Not household butter, certainly."

As Brigadier Sénateur was a joker, all the gendarmes had **grown** facetious, and the officer continued:

"Where is your butter?"

"My butter?"

"Yes, your butter."

"In the jar."

"Then where is the butter jar?"

"Here it is."

She brought out an old cup, at the bottom of which there was a layer of rancid salt butter. The brigadier smelled it and said with a shake of his head:

"It is not the same. I want the butter that smells of the rabbit. Come, Lenient, open your eyes; look under the sideboard, my good fellow, and I will look under the bed."

Having shut the door, he went up to the bed and tried to move it, but it was fixed to the wall and had not been moved for more than half a century, apparently. Then the brigadier stooped and made his uniform crack. A button had flown off.

"Lenient," he said.

"Yes, Brigadier?"

"Come here, my lad, and look under the bed; I am too tall. I will look after the sideboard."

He got up and waited while his man executed his orders."

Lenient, who was short and stout, took off his kepi, laid himself on his stomach and, putting his face on the floor, looked at the black cavity under the bed. Then suddenly he exclaimed:

"All right, here we are!"

"What have you got? The rabbit?"

"No, the thief."

"The thief! Pull him out, pull him out!"

The gendarme had put his arms under the bed and laid hold of something. He pulled with all his might, and at last a foot shod in a thick boot appeared, which he was holding in his right hand. The brigadier grabbed it, crying:

"Pull, pull!"

And Lenient, who was on his knees by that time, was pulling at the other leg. But it was a hard job, for the prisoner kicked out hard and arched up his back across the bed.

"Courage! Courage! Pull! Pull!" Sénateur cried, and they pulled with all their strength—so hard that the wooden bar gave way and the victim came out as far as his head. At last they got that out also and saw the terrified and furious face of Polyte, whose arms remained stretched out under the bed.

"Pull away!" the brigadier kept on exclaiming. Then they heard a strange noise as the arms followed the shoulders and the hands the arms. In the hands was the handle of a saucepan and at the end of the handle the pan itself, which contained stewed rabbit.

"Good lord! Good lord!" the brigadier shouted in his delight, while Lenient took charge of the man. The rabbit's skin, an overwhelming proof, was discovered under the mattress, and the gendarmes returned in triumph to the prison with their prisoner and their booty.

A week later, as the affair had made much stir, Lecacheur, on going into the *mairie* to consult the schoolmaster, was told that the shepherd Severin had been waiting for him for more than an hour. He found him sitting on a chair in a corner with his stick between his legs. When he saw the mayor he got up, took off his cap and said:

"Good morning, Maître Cacheux," and then he remained standing, timid and embarrassed.

"What do you want?" the former said.

"This is it, monsieur. Is it true that somebody stole one of your rabbits last week?"

"Yes, it is quite true, Severin."

"Who stole the rabbit?"

"Polyte Ancas, the laborer."

"Right! Right! And is it also true that it was found under my bed?"

"What do you mean, the rabbit?"

"The rabbit and then Polyte."

"Yes, my poor Severin, quite true, but who told you?"

"Pretty well everybody. I understand! And I suppose you know all about marriages, as you marry ¹ people?"

"What about marriage?"

"With regard to one's rights."

"What rights?"

"The husband's rights and then the wife's rights."

"Of course I do."

"Oh! Then just tell me, M'sieu Cacheux, has my wife the right to go to bed with Polyte?"

"What do you mean by going to bed with Polyte?"

¹ In France the civil marriage is compulsory.

"Yes, has she any right before the law, and seeing that she is my wife, to go to bed with Polyte?"

"Why, of course not, of course not."

"If I catch him there again shall I have the right to thrash him and her also?"

"Why—why—why, yes."

"Very well, then; I will tell you why I want to know. One night last week, as I had my suspicions, I came in suddenly, and they were not behaving properly. I chucked Polyte out to go and sleep somewhere else, but that was all, as I did not know what my rights were. This time I did not see them; I only heard of it from others. That is over, and we will not say any more about it; but if I catch them again—by God! if I catch them again—I will make them lose all taste for such nonsense, Maitre Cacheux, as sure as my name is Severin."

WAITER, A BOCK!¹

WHY, ON THIS PARTICULAR EVENING, did I enter a certain beer shop? I cannot explain it. It was bitterly cold. A fine rain, a watery mist, floated about, veiling the gas jets in a transparent fog, making the pavements under the shadow of the shop fronts glitter, which revealed the soft slush and the soiled feet of the passers-by.

I was going nowhere in particular; was simply having a short walk after dinner. I had passed the Credit Lyonnais, the Rue Vivienne and several other streets. Suddenly I descried a large café, which was more than half full. I walked inside with no object in mind. I was not the least thirsty.

By a searching glance I detected a place where I would not be too much crowded. So I went and sat down by the side of a man who seemed to me to be old and who smoked a halfpenny clay pipe, which had become as black as coal. From six to eight beer saucers were piled up on the table in front of him, indicating the number of bocks he had already absorbed. With that same glance I had recognized in him a "regular toper," one of those frequenters of beerhouses who come in the morning as soon as the place is open and only go away in the evening when it is about to close. He was dirty, bald to about the middle of the cranium, while his long gray hair fell over the neck of his frock coat. His clothes, much too large for him, appeared to have been made for him at a time when he was very stout. One could guess that his

¹ Bavarian beer.

pantaloons were not held up by braces and that this man could not take ten paces without having to pull them up and readjust them. Did he wear a vest? The mere thought of his boots and the feet they enveloped filled me with horror. The frayed cuffs were as black at the edges as were his nails.

As soon as I had sat down near him this queer creature said to me in a tranquil tone of voice:

"How goes it with you?"

I turned sharply round to him and closely scanned his features, whereupon he continued:

"I see you do not recognize me."

"No, I do not."

"Des Barrets."

I was stupefied. It was Count Jean des Barrets, my old college chum.

I seized him by the hand, so dumfounded that I could find nothing to say. I at length managed to stammer out:

"And you, how goes it with you?"

He responded placidly:

"With me? Just as I like."

He became silent. I wanted to be friendly and I selected this phrase:

"What are you doing now?"

"You see what I am doing," he answered, quite resignedly.

I felt my face getting red. I insisted:

"But every day?"

"Every day is alike to me," was his response, accompanied with a thick puff of tobacco smoke.

He then tapped on the top of the marble table with a sou to attract the attention of the waiter and called out:

"Waiter, two bocks."

A voice in the distance repeated:

"Two bocks instead of four."

Another voice, more distant still, shouted out:

"Here they are, sir, here they are."

Immediately there appeared a man with a white apron carrying two bocks, which he set down foaming on the table, the foam running over the edge onto the sandy floor.

Des Barrets emptied his glass at a single draught and replaced it on the table, sucking in the drops of beer that had been left on his mustache. He next asked:

"What is there new?"

"I know of nothing new, worth mentioning, really," I stammered. "But nothing has grown old for me; I am a commercial man."

In an equable tone of voice he said:

"Indeed—does that amuse you?"

"No, but what do you mean by that? Surely you must do something!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I only mean, how do you pass your time?"

"What's the use of occupying myself with anything? For my part, I do nothing at all, as you see, never anything. When one has not got a sou one can understand why one has to go to work. What is the good of working? Do you work for yourself or for others? If you work for yourself you do it for your own amusement, which is all right; if you work for others you reap nothing but ingratitude."

Then, sticking his pipe into his mouth, he called out anew:

"Waiter, a bock! It makes me thirsty to keep calling so. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing. Yes, I do nothing; I let things slide and I am growing old. In dying I shall have nothing to regret. If so, I should remember nothing outside this public house. I have no wife, no children, no cares, no sorrows, nothing. That is the very best that could happen to one."

He then emptied the glass which had been brought him, passed his tongue over his lips and resumed his pipe.

I looked at him, stupefied, and asked him:

"But you have not always been like that?"

"Pardon me, sir; ever since I left college."

"It is not a proper life to lead, my dear sir; it is simply horrible. Come, you must indeed have done something; you must have loved something; you must have friends."

"No, I get up at noon; I come here; I have my breakfast; I drink my bock; I remain until evening; I have my dinner; I drink bock. Then about one in the morning I return to my couch, because the place closes up. And it is this latter that embitters me more than anything. For the last ten years I have passed six tenths of my time on this bench in my corner and the other four tenths in my bed, never changing. I talk sometimes with the habitués."

"But on arriving in Paris what did you do at first?"

"I paid my devoirs to the Café de Mediis."

"What next?"

"Next? I crossed the water and came here."

"Why did you take even that trouble?"

"What do you mean? One cannot remain all one's life in the Latin Quarter. The students make too much noise. But I do not move about any longer. Waiter, a bock."

I now began to think that he was making fun of me, and I continued:

"Come now, be frank. You have been the victim of some great sor-

row; despair in love, no doubt! It is easy to see that you are a man whom misfortune has hit hard. What age are you?"

"I am thirty years of age, but I look to be forty-five at least."

I looked him straight in the face. His shrunken figure, badly cared for, gave one the impression that he was an old man. On the summit of his cranium a few long hairs shot straight up from a skin of doubtful cleanness. He had enormous eyelashes, a large mustache and a thick beard. Suddenly I had a kind of vision—I know not why—the vision of a basin filled with noisome water, the water which should have been applied to that poll. I said to him:

"Verily, you look to be more than that age. Of a certainty you must have experienced some great disappointment."

He replied:

"I tell you that I have not. I am old because I never take air. There is nothing that vitiates the life of a man more than the atmosphere of a café."

I could not believe him.

"You must surely have been married as well? One could not get baldheaded as you are without having been much in love."

He shook his head, sending down his back little hairs from the scalp.

"No, I have always been virtuous."

And, raising his eyes toward the luster which beat down on our heads, he said:

"If I am bald-headed it is the fault of the gas. It is the enemy of hair. Waiter, a bock. You must be thirsty also?"

"No, thank you. But you certainly interest me. When did you have your first discouragement? Your life is not normal; is not natural. There is something under it all."

"Yes, and it dates from my infancy. I received a heavy blow when I was very young. It turned my life into darkness, which will last to the end."

"How did it come about?"

"You wish to know about it? Well then, listen. You recall, of course, the castle in which I was brought up, seeing that you used to visit it for five or six months during the vacations. You remember that large gray building in the middle of a great park and the long avenue of oaks, which opened toward the four cardinal points? You remember my father and my mother, both of whom were ceremonious, solemn and severe?"

"I worshiped my mother; I was suspicious of my father, but I respected both, accustomed always as I was to see everyone bow before them. In the country they were Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse, and our neighbors, the Tannemares, the Ravelets, the Brenneilles, showed the utmost consideration for them."

"I was then thirteen years old, happy, satisfied with everything, as one is at that age, and full of joy and vivacity.

"Now toward the end of September, a few days before entering the lycée, while I was enjoying myself in the mazes of the park, climbing the trees and swinging on the branches, I saw crossing an avenue my father and mother, who were walking together.

"I recall the thing as though it were yesterday. It was a very windy day. The whole line of trees bent under the pressure of the wind, moaned and seemed to utter cries—cries dull, yet deep—so that the whole forest groaned under the gale.

"Evening had come on, and it was dark in the thickets. The agitation of the wind and the branches excited me, made me skip about like an idiot and howl in imitation of the wolves.

"As soon as I perceived my parents I crept furtively toward them under the branches, in order to surprise them, as though I had been a veritable wolf. But suddenly seized with fear, I stopped a few paces from them. My father, a prey to the most violent passion, cried:

"Your mother is a fool; moreover, it is not your mother that is the question; it is you. I tell you that I want money, and I will make you sign this.

"My mother responded in a firm voice:

"I will not sign it. It is Jean's fortune; I shall guard it for him and I will not allow you to devour it with strange women, as you have your own heritage."

"Then my father, full of rage, wheeled round and seized his wife by the throat and began to slap her full in the face with the disengaged hand.

"My mother's hat fell off; her hair became disheveled and fell down her back; she essayed to parry the blows but could not escape from them. And my father, like a madman, banged and banged at her. My mother rolled over on the ground, covering her face in both her hands. Then he turned her over on her back in order to batter her still more, pulling away the hands which were covering her face.

"As for me, my friend, it seemed as though the world had come to an end, that the eternal laws had changed. I experienced the overwhelming dread that one has in presence of things supernatural, in presence of irreparable disaster. My boyish head whirled round and soared. I began to cry with all my might without knowing why, a prey to terror, to grief, to a dreadful bewilderment. My father heard me. I believed that he wanted to kill me, and I fled like a hunted animal, running straight in front of me through the woods.

"I ran perhaps for an hour, perhaps for two; I know not. Darkness had set in; I tumbled over some thick herbs, exhausted, and I lay there

lost, devoured by terror, eaten up by a sorrow capable of breaking forever the heart of a child. I became cold; I became hungry. At length day broke. I dared neither get up, walk, return home or save myself, fearing to encounter my father whom I did not wish to see again.

"I should probably have died of misery and of hunger at the foot of a tree if the guard had not discovered me and led me by force.

"I found my parents wearing their ordinary aspect. My mother alone spoke to me:

"How you have frightened me, you naughty boy; I have been the whole night sleepless."

"I did not answer but began to weep. My father did not utter a single word.

"Eight days later I entered the lycée.

"Well, my friend, it war all over with me. I had witnessed the other side of things, the bad side; I have not been able to perceive the good side since that day. What things have passed in my mind, what strange phenomena have warped my ideas, I do not know. But I no longer have a taste for anything, a wish for anything, a love for anybody, a desire for anything whatever, no ambition, no hope. And I always see my poor mother lying on the ground in the avenue while my father was maltreating her. My mother died a few years after; my father lives still. I have not seen him since. Waiter, a bock."

A waiter brought him his bock, which he swallowed at a gulp. But in taking up his pipe again, trembling as he was, he broke it. Then he made a violent gesture:

"Zounds! This is indeed a grief, a real grief. I have had it for a month, and it was coloring so beautifully!"

Then he went off through the vast saloon which was now full of smoke and of people drinking, calling out:

"Waiter, a bock—and a new pipe."

THE SEQUEL TO A DIVORCE

CERTAINLY, although he had been engaged in the most extraordinary, most unlikely, most extravagant and funniest cases and had won legal games without a trump in his hand, although he had worked out the obscure law of divorce as if it had been a California gold mine, Maître¹ Garrulier, the celebrated, the only Garrulier, could not check a movement of surprise, or a disheartening shake of the head or a smile when

¹ Title given to advocates in France.

the Countess de Baudémont explained her affairs to him for the first time.

He had just opened his correspondence, and his slender hands on which he bestowed the greatest attention buried themselves in a heap of female letters, and one might have thought oneself in the confessional of a fashionable preacher, so impregnated was the atmosphere with delicate perfumes.

Immediately, even before she had said a word, with the sharp glance of a practiced man of the world, that look which made beautiful Mme de Serpenoise say: "He strips your heart bare!" the lawyer had classed her in the third category. Those who suffer came into his first category; those who love, into the second, and those who are bored, into the third—and she belonged to the latter.

She was a pretty windmill, whose sails turned and flew round and fretted the blue sky with a delicious shiver of joy, as it were, and had the brain of a bird, in which four correct and healthy ideas cannot exist side by side and in which all dreams and every kind of folly are engulfed, like a great kaleidoscope.

Incapable of hurting a fly, emotional, charitable, with a feeling of tenderness for the street girl who sells bunches of violets for a penny, for a cab horse which the driver is ill using, for a melancholy pauper's funeral, when the body, without friends or relations to follow it, is being conveyed to the common grave, doing anything that might afford five minutes' amusement, not caring if she made men miserable for the rest of their days and taking pleasure in kindling passions which consumed men's whole being, looking upon life as too short to be anything else than one uninterrupted round of gaiety and enjoyment, she thought that people might find plenty of time for being serious and reasonable in the evening of life, when they are at the bottom of the hill and their looking glasses reveal a wrinkled face surrounded with white hair.

A thoroughbred Parisian whom one would follow to the end of the world like a poodle, a woman whom one adores with the head, the heart and the senses until one is nearly driven mad as soon as one has inhaled the delicate perfume that emanates from her dress and hair or touched her skin and heard her laugh, a woman for whom one would fight a duel and risk one's life without a thought, for whom a man would remove mountains and sell his soul to the devil several times over, if the devil were still in the habit of frequenting the places of bad repute on this earth.

She had perhaps come to see this Garrulier, whom she had so often heard mentioned at five o'clock teas, so as to be able to describe him to

her female friends subsequently in droll phrases, imitating his gestures and the unctuous inflections of his voice in order, perhaps, to experience some new sensation or, perhaps, for the sake of dressing like a woman who was going to try for a divorce, and certainly the whole effect was perfect. She wore a splendid cloak embroidered with jet—which gave an almost serious effect to her golden hair, to her small, slightly turned-up nose with its quivering nostrils and to her large eyes, full of enigma and fun—over a dark dress which was fastened at the neck by a sapphire and a diamond pin.

The barrister did not interrupt her but allowed her to get excited and to chatter, to enumerate her causes for complaint against poor Count de Baudémont, who certainly had no suspicion of his wife's escapade and who would have been very much surprised if anyone told him of it at that moment, when he was taking his fencing lesson at the club.

When she had quite finished he said coolly, as if he were throwing a pail of water on some burning straw:

"But, madame, there is not the slightest pretext for a divorce in anything that you have told me here. The judges would ask me whether I took the law courts for a theater and intended to make fun of them."

And seeing how disheartened she was, that she looked like a child whose favorite toy had been broken, that she was so pretty that he would have liked to kiss her hands in his devotion, and as she seemed to be witty and very amusing, and as, moreover, he had no objection to such visits being prolonged, when papers had to be looked over, while sitting close together, Maître Garrulier appeared to be considering. Taking his chin in his hand, he said:

"However, I will think it over; there is sure to be some dark spot that can be made out worse. Write to me and come and see me again."

In the course of her visits that black spot had increased so much, and Countess de Baudémont had followed her lawyer's advice so punctually and had played on the various strings so skillfully that a few months later, after a lawsuit which is still spoken of, in the course of which the president had to take off his spectacles and to use his pocket handkerchief noisily, the divorce was pronounced in favor of the Countess Marie Anne Nicole Bournet de Baudémont, née de Tanchart de Peothus.

The count, who was nonplused at such an adventure turning out so seriously, first of all flew into a terrible rage, rushed off to the lawyer's office and threatened to cut off his knavish ears for him. But when his access of fury was over and he thought of it, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"All the better for her if it amuses her!"

Then he bought Baron Silberstein's yacht and with some friends got up a cruise to Ceylon and India.

Marie Anne began by triumphing and felt as happy as a schoolgirl going home for the holidays; she committed every possible folly and soon, tired, satiated and disgusted, began to yawn, cried and found out that she had sacrificed her happiness, like a millionaire who has gone mad and has cast his bank notes and shares into the river, and that she was nothing more than a disabled waif and stray. Consequently, she now married again, as the solitude of her home made her morose from morning till night; and then, besides, she found a woman requires a mansion when she goes into society, to race meetings or to the theater.

And so while she became a marchioness and pronounced her second "Yes" before a very few friends at the office of the mayor of the English urban district, malicious people in the Faubourg were making fun of the whole affair and affirming this and that, whether rightly or wrongly, and comparing the present husband with the former one, even declaring that he had partially been the cause of the former divorce. Meanwhile M. de Baudémont was wandering over the four quarters of the globe, trying to overcome his homesickness and to deaden his longing for love, which had taken possession of his heart and of his body, like a slow poison.

He traveled through the most out-of-the-way places and the most lovely countries and spent months and months at sea and plunged into every kind of dissipation and debauchery. But neither the supple forms nor the luxurious gestures of the bayaderes, nor the large passive eyes of the Creoles, nor flirtations with English girls with hair the color of new cider, nor nights of waking dreams, when he saw new constellations in the sky, nor dangers during which a man thinks it all over with him and mutters a few words of prayer in spite of himself, when the waves are high and the sky black, nothing was able to make him forget that little Parisian woman who smelled so sweet that she might have been taken for a bouquet of rare flowers; who was so coaxing, so curious, so funny; who never had the same caprice, the same smile or the same look twice and who, at bottom, was worth more than many others, either saints or sinners.

He thought of her constantly during long hours of sleeplessness. He carried her portrait about with him in the breast pocket of his pea jacket—a charming portrait in which she was smiling and showing her white teeth between her half-open lips. Her gentle eyes with their magnetic look had a happy, frank expression, and from the mere arrangement of her hair one could see that she was fair among the fair.

He used to kiss that portrait of the woman who had been his wife, as

if he wished to efface it, would look at it for hours, and then throw himself down on the netting and sob like a child as he looked at the infinite expanse before him, seeming to see their lost happiness, the joys of their perished affections and the divine remembrance of their love in the monotonous waste of green waters. And he tried to accuse himself for all that had occurred and not to be angry with her, to think that his grievances were imaginary and to adore her in spite of everything and always.

And so he roamed about the world, tossed to and fro, suffering and hoping he knew not what. He ventured into the greatest dangers and sought for death just as a man seeks for his mistress, and death passed close to him without touching him, perhaps amused at his grief and misery.

For he was as wretched as a stonebreaker, as one of those poor devils who work and nearly break their backs over the hard flints the whole day long under the scorching sun or the cold rain, and Marie Anne herself was not happy, for she was pining for the past and remembered their former love.

At last, however, he returned to France, changed, tanned by exposure, sun and rain and transformed as if by some witch's philter.

Nobody would have recognized the elegant and effeminate clubman in this corsair with broad shoulders, a skin the color of tan, with very red lips, who rolled a little in his walk, who seemed to be stifled in his black dress coat but who still retained the distinguished manners and bearing of a nobleman of the last century, one of those who, when he was ruined, fitted out a privateer and fell upon the English wherever he met them, from St. Milo to Calcutta. And wherever he showed himself his friends exclaimed:

"Why! Is that you? I should never have known you again!"

He was very nearly starting off again immediately; he even telegraphed orders to Havre to get the steam yacht ready for sea directly, when he heard that Marie Anne had married again.

He saw her in the distance at the Théâtre Français one Tuesday, and when he noticed how pretty, how fair, how desirable she was—looking so melancholy, with all the appearance of an unhappy soul that regrets something—his determination grew weaker, and he delayed his departure from week to week and waited, without knowing why, until at last, worn out with the struggle, watching her wherever she went, more in love with her than he had ever been, he wrote her long, mad, ardent letters in which his passion overflowed like a stream of lava.

He altered his handwriting, as he remembered her restless brain and her many whims. He sent her the flowers which he knew she liked

best and told her that she was his life, that he was dying of waiting for her, of longing for her, for her, his idol.

At last, very much puzzled and surprised, guessing—who knows?—from the instinctive beating of her heart and her general emotion that it must be he this time, he whose soul she had tortured with such cold cruelty, and knowing that she could make amends for the past and bring back their former love, she replied to him and granted him the meeting that he asked for. She fell into his arms, and they both sobbed with joy and ecstasy. Their kisses were those which lips give only when they have lost each other and found each other again at last, when they meet and exhaust themselves in each other's looks, thirsting for tenderness, love and enjoyment.

Last week Count de Baudémont carried off Marie Anne quietly and coolly, just like one resumes possession of one's house on returning from a journey and drives out the intruders. And when Maître Garrulier was told of this unheard-of scandal he rubbed his hands—the long, delicate hands of a sensual prelate—and exclaimed:

“That is absolutely logical, and I should like to be in their place.”

THE CLOWN

THE HAWKERS' COTTAGE stood at the end of the Esplanade, on the little promontory where the jetty is and where all the winds, all the rain and all the spray met. The hut, both walls and roof, was built of old planks, more or less covered with tar; its chinks were stopped with oakum, and dry wreckage was heaped up against it. In the middle of the room an iron pot stood on two bricks and served as a stove when they had any coal, but as there was no chimney, it filled the room, which was ventilated only by a low door, with acrid smoke, and there the whole crew lived, eighteen men and one woman. Some had undergone various terms of imprisonment, and nobody knew what the others had done, but though they were all more or less suffering from some physical defect and were virtually old men, they were still all strong enough for hauling. For Chamber of Commerce tolerated them there and allowed them that hovel to live in, on condition that they should be ready to haul by day and by night.

For each vessel they hauled each got a penny by day and twopence by night. It was not certain, however, on account of the competition

of retired sailors, fishermen's wives, laborers who had nothing to do, people who were all stronger than those half-starved wretches in the hut.

And yet they lived there, those eighteen men and one woman. Were they happy? Certainly not. Hopeless? Not that, either, for they occasionally got a little beside their scanty pay, and then they stole occasionally, fish, lumps of coal, things without value to those who lost them, but of great value to the poor, beggarly thieves.

The eighteen supported the woman, and there was no jealousy on her account! She had no special favorite among them.

She was a fat woman of about forty, chubby faced and puffy, of whom Daddy la Bretagne, who was one of the eighteen, used to say: "She does us honor."

If she had had a favorite among them Daddy la Bretagne would certainly have had the greatest right to that privilege, for although he was one of the most crippled among them, being partially paralyzed in his legs, he showed himself as skillful and strong-armed as any of them, and in spite of his infirmities, he always managed to secure a good place in the row of haulers. None of them knew as well as he how to inspire visitors with pity during the season and to make them put their hands into their pockets. He was a past master at cadging, so that among those empty stomachs and penniless rascals he had windfalls of victuals and coppers more frequently than fell rightly to his share. But he did not make use of them in order to monopolize their common mistress.

"I am just," he used to say. "Let each of us have his spoonful in turn and no more, when we are all eating out of the same dish."

With the coal he picked up he used to make a good fire for the whole band in the iron pot, over which he cooked whatever he brought home with him, without anyone complaining about it, for he used to say:

"It gives you a good fire at which to warm yourselves for nothing, and the smell of my stew into the bargain."

As for his money, he spent it in drink with the trollop, and afterward, what was left of it, with the others.

"You see," he used to say, "I am just, and more than just. I give her up to you because it is your right."

The consequence was that they all liked Daddy la Bretagne, so that he gloried in it and said proudly:

"What a pity that we are living under the Republic! These fellows would think nothing of making me king."

And one day when he said this his trollop replied: "The king is here, old fellow!" And at the same time she presented a new comrade to them who was no less ragged or wretched looking than the eighteen,

but quite young by the side of him. He was a tall thin fellow of about forty and without a gray streak in his long hair. He was dressed only in a pair of trousers and a shirt, which he wore outside them, like a blouse, and the trollop said:

"Here, Daddy la Bretagne, you have two knitted vests on, so just give him one."

"Why should I?" the hauler asked.

"Because I choose you to," the woman replied. "I have been living with you set of old men for a long time, so now I want to have a young one; there he is, so you must give him a vest and keep him here, or I shall throw you up. You may take it or leave it, as you like; do you understand me?"

The eighteen looked at each other, openmouthed, and good Daddy la Bretagne scratched his head and then said:

"What she asks is quite right, and we must give way," he replied.

Then they explained themselves and came to an understanding. The poor devil did not come like a conqueror, for he was a wretched clown who had just been released from prison, where he had undergone three years' hard labor for an attempted outrage on a girl, but with one exception, the best fellow in the world, so people declared.

"And something nice for me," the trollop said, "for I can assure you that I mean him to reward me for anything I may do for him."

From that time the household of eighteen persons was increased to nineteen, and at first all went well. The clown was very humble and tried not to be burdensome to them. Fed, clothed and supplied with tobacco, he tried not to be too exacting in the other matter, and if needful, he would have hauled like the others, but the woman would not allow it.

"You shall not fatigue yourself, my little man," she said. "You must reserve yourself entirely for home."

And he did as she wished.

And soon the eighteen, who had never been jealous of each other, grew jealous of the favored lover. Some tried to pick a quarrel with him. He resisted. The best fellow in the world, no doubt, but he was not going to be taken for a mussel shut up in its shell, for all that. Let them call him as lazy as a priest if they liked; he did not mind that, but when they put hairs into his coffee, armfuls of rushes among his wreckage and filth into his soup, they had better look out!

"None of that, all the lot of you, or you will see what I can do," he used to say.

They repeated their practical jokes, however, and he thrashed them. He did not try to find out who the culprits were but attacked the first one he met, so much the worse for him. With a kick from his wooden

clog (it was his specialty) he smashed their noses into a pulp, and having thus acquired the knowledge of his strength and urged on by his trollop, he soon became a tyrant. The eighteen felt that they were slaves, and their former paradise, where concord and perfect equality had reigned, became a hell, and that state of things could not last.

"Ah!" Daddy la Bretagne growled, "if only I were twenty years younger, I would nearly kill him! I have my Breton's hot head still, but my confounded legs are no good any longer."

And he boldly challenged the clown to a duel in which the latter was to have his legs tied, and then both of them were to sit on the ground and hack at each other with knives.

"Such a duel," he said, "would be perfectly fair!" he replied, kicking him in the side with one of his clogs, and the woman burst out laughing and said:

"At any rate you cannot compete with him on equal terms as regards myself, so do not worry yourself about it."

Daddy la Bretagne was lying in his corner and spitting blood, and none of the rest spoke. What could the others do when he, the blusterer of them all, had been served so? The jade had been right when she had brought in the intruder and said:

"The king is here, old fellow."

Only she ought to have remembered that, after all, she alone kept his subjects in check, and as Daddy la Bretagne said, by a right object. With her to console them they would no doubt have borne anything, but she was foolish enough to cut down their food and not to fill their common dish as full as it used to be. She wanted to keep everything for her lover, and that raised the exasperation of the eighteen to its height. So one night when she and the clown were asleep among all these fasting men, the eighteen threw themselves on them. They wrapped the despot's arms and legs up in tarpaulin, and in the presence of the woman who was firmly bound they flogged him till he was black and blue.

"Yes," old Bretagne said to me himself. "Yes, monsieur, that was our revenge. The king was guillotined in 1793, and so we guillotined our king also."

And he concluded with a sneer, saying: "But we wished to be just, and as it was not his head that had made him our king, by Jove, we settled him."

THE MAD WOMAN

"I CAN TELL YOU a terrible story about the Franco-Prussian War," M. d'Endolin said to some friends assembled in the smoking room of Baron de Ravot's château. "You know my house in the Faubourg de Corneil. I was living there when the Prussians came, and I had for a neighbor a kind of mad woman who had lost her senses in consequence of a series of misfortunes. At the age of seven and twenty she had lost her father, her husband and her newly born child, all in the space of a month.

"When death has once entered into a house it almost invariably returns immediately, as if it knew the way, and the young woman, overwhelmed with grief, took to her bed and was delirious for six weeks. Then a species of calm lassitude succeeded that violent crisis, and she remained motionless, eating next to nothing and only moving her eyes. Every time they tried to make her get up she screamed as if they were about to kill her, and so they ended by leaving her continually in bed and only taking her out to wash her, to change her linen and to turn her mattress.

"An old servant remained with her to give her something to drink or a little cold meat from time to time. What passed in that despairing mind? No one ever knew, for she did not speak at all now. Was she thinking of the dead? Was she dreaming sadly, without any precise recollection of anything that had happened? Or was her memory as stagnant as water without any current? But however this may have been, for fifteen years she remained thus inert and secluded.

"The war broke out, and in the beginning of December the Germans came to Corneil. I can remember it as if it were but yesterday. It was freezing hard enough to split the stones, and I myself was lying back in an armchair, being unable to move on account of the gout, when I heard their heavy and regular tread and could see them pass from my window.

"They defiled past interminably, with that peculiar motion of a puppet on wires, which belongs to them. Then the officers billeted their men on the inhabitants, and I had seventeen of them. My neighbor, the crazy woman, had a dozen, one of whom was the commandant, a regular violent, surly swashbuckler.

"During the first few days everything went on as usual. The officers next door had been told that the lady was ill, and they did not trouble themselves about it in the least, but soon that woman whom they never

saw irritated them. They asked what her illness was and were told that she had been in bed for fifteen years in consequence of terrible grief. No doubt they did not believe it and thought that the poor mad creature would not leave her bed out of pride, so that she might not come near the Prussians or speak to them or even see them.

"The commandant insisted upon her receiving him. He was shown into the room and said to her roughly: 'I must beg you to get up, madame, and come downstairs so that we may all see you.' But she merely turned her vague eyes on him without replying, and so he continued: 'I do not intend to tolerate any insolence, and if you do not get up of your own accord I can easily find means to make you walk without any assistance.'

"But she did not give any signs of having heard him and remained quite motionless. Then he got furious, taking that calm silence for a mark of supreme contempt, so he added: 'If you do not come downstairs tomorrow——' And then he left the room.

"The next day the terrified old servant wished to dress her, but the mad woman began to scream violently and resisted with all her might. The officer ran upstairs quickly, and the servant threw herself at his feet and cried: 'She will not come down, monsieur; she will not. Forgive her, for she is so unhappy.'

"The soldier was embarrassed, as in spite of his anger he did not venture to order his soldiers to drag her out. But suddenly he began to laugh and gave some orders in German, and soon a party of soldiers was seen coming out, supporting a mattress as if they were carrying a wounded man. On that bed, which had been unmade, the mad woman, who was still silent, was lying quite quietly, for she was quite indifferent to anything that went on, as long as they let her lie. Behind her a soldier was carrying a parcel of feminine attire, and the officer said, rubbing his hands: 'We will just see whether you cannot dress yourself alone and take a little walk.'

"And then the procession went off in the direction of the forest of Imauville; in two hours the soldiers came back alone, and nothing more was seen of the mad woman. What had they done with her? Where had they taken her to? No one knew.

"The snow was falling day and night and enveloped the plain and the woods in a shroud of frozen foam, and the wolves came and howled at our very doors.

"The thought of that poor lost woman haunted me, and I made several applications to the Prussian authorities in order to obtain some information and was nearly shot for doing so. When spring returned the army of occupation withdrew, but my neighbor's house remained closed, and the grass grew thick in the garden walks. The old serv-

ant had died during the winter, and nobody troubled any longer about the occurrence; I alone thought about it constantly. What had they done with the woman? Had she escaped through the forest? Had somebody found her and taken her to a hospital without being able to obtain any information from her? Nothing happened to relieve my doubts, but by degrees time assuaged my fears.

"Well, in the following autumn the woodcock were very plentiful, and as my gout had left me for a time, I dragged myself as far as the forest. I had already killed four or five of the long-billed birds, when I knocked over one which fell into a ditch full of branches, and I was obliged to get into it in order to pick it up, and I found that it had fallen close to a dead, human body. Immediately the recollection of the mad woman struck me like a blow in the chest. Many other people had perhaps died in the wood during that disastrous year, but though I do not know why, I was sure, sure, I tell you, that I should see the head of that wretched maniac.

"And suddenly I understood; I guessed everything. They had abandoned her on that mattress in the cold, deserted wood, and, faithful to her fixed idea, she had allowed herself to perish under that thick and light counterpane of snow without moving either arms or legs.

"Then the wolves had devoured her, and the birds had built their nests with the wool from her torn bed, and I took charge of her bones. I only pray that our sons may never see any wars again."

MADemoisELLE

HE HAD BEEN REGISTERED under the names of Jean Marie Mathieu Valot, but he was never called anything but Mademoiselle. He was the idiot of the district, but not one of those wretched, ragged idiots who live on public charity. He lived comfortably on a small income which his mother had left him and which his guardian paid him regularly, so he was rather envied than pitied. And then he was not one of those idiots with wild looks and the manners of an animal, for he was by no means an unpleasing object, with his half-open lips and smiling eyes, and especially in his constant make-up in female dress. For he dressed like a girl and showed by that how little he objected to being called Mademoiselle.

And why should he not like the nickname which his mother had given him affectionately when he was a mere child, so delicate and weak and with a fair complexion—a poor little diminutive lad, not as tall as many girls of the same age? It was in pure love that in his earlier

years his mother whispered that tender Mademoiselle to him, while his old grandmother used to say jokingly:

"The fact is, that as for the male element in him, it is really not worth mentioning in a Christian—no offense to God in saying so." And his grandfather, who was equally fond of a joke, used to add: "I only hope it will not disappear as he grows up."

And they treated him as if he had really been a girl and coddled him, the more so as they were very prosperous and did not require to toil to keep things together.

When his mother and grandparents were dead Mademoiselle was almost as happy with his paternal uncle, an unmarried man who had carefully attended the idiot and who had grown more and more attached to him by dint of looking after him, and the worthy man continued to call Jean Marie Mathieu Valot Mademoiselle.

He was called so in all the country round as well, not with the slightest intention of hurting his feelings, but, on the contrary, because all thought they would please the poor gentle creature who harmed nobody in doing so.

The very street boys meant no harm by it, accustomed as they were to call the tall idiot in a frock and cap by the nickname, but it would have struck them as very extraordinary and would have led them to rude fun if they had seen him dressed like a boy.

Mademoiselle, however, took care of that, for his dress was as dear to him as his nickname. He delighted in wearing it and, in fact, cared for nothing else, and what gave it a particular zest was that he knew that he was not a girl and that he was living in disguise. And this was evident by the exaggerated feminine bearing and walk he put on, as if to show that it was not natural to him. His enormous, carefully filled cap was adorned with large variegated ribbons. His petticoat, with numerous flounces, was distended behind by many hoops. He walked with short steps and with exaggerated swaying of the hips, while his folded arms and crossed hands were distorted into pretensions of comical coquetry.

On such occasions if anybody wished to make friends with him it was necessary to say:

"Ah, Mademoiselle, what a nice girl you make."

That put him into a good humor, and he used to reply, much pleased: "Don't I? But people can see I only do it for a joke."

But, nevertheless, when they were dancing at village festivals in the neighborhood he would always be invited to dance as Mademoiselle and would never ask any of the girls to dance with him, and one evening when somebody asked him the reason for this he opened his eyes wide, laughed as if the man had said something very stupid and replied:

"I cannot ask the girls because I am not dressed like a lad. Just look at my dress, you fool!"

As his interrogator was a judicious man, he said to him:

"Then dress like one, Mademoiselle."

He thought for a moment and then said with a cunning look:

"But if I dress like a lad I shall no longer be a girl, and then, I am a girl," and he shrugged his shoulders as he said it.

But the remark seemed to make him think.

For some time afterward when he met the same person he would ask him abruptly:

"If I dress like a lad will you still call me Mademoiselle?"

"Of course I shall," the other replied. "You will always be called so."

The idiot appeared delighted, for there was no doubt that he thought more of his nickname than he did of his dress, and the next day he made his appearance in the village square without his petticoats and dressed as a man. He had taken a pair of trousers, a coat and a hat from his guardian's clothes press. This created quite a revolution in the neighborhood, for the people who had been in the habit of smiling at him kindly when he was dressed as a woman looked at him in astonishment and almost in fear, while the indulgent could not help laughing and visibly making fun of him.

The involuntary hostility of some and the too-evident ridicule of others, the disagreeable surprise of all, were too palpable for him not to see it and to be hurt by it, and it was still worse when a street urchin said to him in a jeering voice as he danced round him:

"Oh! Oh! Mademoiselle, you wear trousers! Oh! Oh! Mademoiselle!"

And it grew worse and worse, when a whole band of these vagabonds were on his heels, hooting and yelling after him, as if he had been somebody in a masquerading dress during the carnival.

It was quite certain that the unfortunate creature looked more in disguise now than he had formerly. By dint of living like a girl and by even exaggerating the feminine walk and manners, he had totally lost all masculine looks and ways. His smooth face, his long flax-like hair, required a cap with ribbons and became a caricature under the high chimney-pot hat of the old doctor, his grandfather.

Mademoiselle's shoulders, and especially his swelling stern, danced about wildly in this old-fashioned coat and wide trousers. And nothing was as funny as the contrast between his quiet dress and slow trotting pace, the winning way he used his head and the conceited movements of his hands, with which he fanned himself like a girl.

Soon the older lads and the girls, the old women, men of ripe age and even the judicial councilor joined the little brats and hooted Mademoiselle, while the astonished idiot ran away and rushed into

the house with terror. There he took his poor head between both hands and tried to comprehend the matter. Why were they angry with him? For it was quite evident that they were angry with him. What wrong had he done and whom had he injured by dressing as a boy? Was he not a boy, after all? For the first time in his life he felt a horror for his nickname, for had he not been insulted through it? But immediately he was seized with a horrible doubt.

"Suppose that, after all, I am a girl?"

He would have liked to ask his guardian about it but he did not like to, for he somehow felt, although only obscurely, that he, worthy man, might not tell him the truth out of kindness. And, besides, he preferred to find out for himself without asking anyone.

All the idiot's cunning, which had been lying latent up till then because he never had any occasion to make use of it, now came out and urged him to a solitary and dark action.

The next day he dressed himself as a girl again and made his appearance as if he had perfectly forgotten his escapade of the day before, but the people, especially the street boys, had not forgotten it. They looked at him sideways, and even the best of them could not help smiling, while the little blackguards ran after him and said:

"Oh! Oh! Mademoiselle, you had on a pair of breeches!"

But he pretended not to hear or even to guess to what they were alluding. He seemed as happy and glad to look about him as he usually did, with half-open lips and smiling eyes. As usual, he wore an enormous cap with variegated ribbons and the same large petticoats; he walked with short, mincing steps, swaying and wriggling his hips and gesticulating like a coquette and licked his lips when they called him Mademoiselle, while really he would have liked to have jumped at the throats of those who called him so.

Days and months passed, and by degrees those about him forgot all about his strange escapade. But he had never left off thinking about it or trying to find out—for which he was ever on the alert—how he could ascertain his qualities as a boy and how to assert them victoriously. Really innocent, he had reached the age of twenty without knowing anything or without ever having any natural impulse, but being tenacious of purpose, curious and dissembling, he asked no questions but observed all that was said and done.

Often at their village dances he had heard young fellows boasting about girls whom they had seduced and girls praising such and such a young fellow, and often, also after a dance he saw the couples go away together, with their arms round each other's waists. They had no suspicions of him, and he listened and watched, until at last he discovered what was going on.

And then one night when dancing was over and the couples were going away with their arms round each other's waists, a terrible screaming was heard at the corner of the wood through which those going to the next village had to pass. It was Josephine, pretty Josephine, and when her screams were heard they ran to her assistance and arrived only just in time to rescue her, half strangled, from Mademoiselle's clutches.

The idiot had watched her and had thrown himself upon her in order to treat her as the other young fellows did the girls, but she resisted him so stoutly that he took her by the throat and squeezed it with all his might until she could not breathe and was nearly dead.

In rescuing Josephine from him they had thrown him on the ground, but he jumped up again immediately, foaming at the mouth and slobbering and exclaimed:

"I am not a girl any longer; I am a young man. I am a young man, I tell you."

A BAD ERROR

I MADE Mme Jadelle's acquaintance in Paris this winter. She pleased me infinitely at once. You know her as well as I—no—pardon me—nearly as well as I. You know that she is poetic and fantastic at one and the same time. You know she is free in her manner and of impressionable heart, impulsive, courageous, venturesome, audacious—above all, prejudiced and yet, in spite of that, sentimental, delicate, easily hurt, tender and modest.

She was a widow, and I adore widows, from sheer laziness. I was on the lookout for a wife, and I paid her my court. I knew her, and more than that, she pleased me. The moment came when I believed it would do to risk my proposal. I was in love with her and in danger of becoming too much so. When one marries he should not love his wife too much, or he is likely to make himself foolish; his vision is distorted, and he becomes silly and brutal at the same time. A man must assert himself. If he loses his head at first he risks being a nobody a year later.

So one day I presented myself at her house with light gloves on and I said to her: "Madame, I have the honor of loving you, and I have come to ask you if there is any hope of my pleasing you enough to warrant your placing your happiness in my care and taking my name."

She answered quietly: "What a question, sir! I am absolutely ignor-

ant of whether you will please me sooner or later or whether you will not, but I ask nothing better than to make a trial of it. As a man, I do not find you bad. It remains to be seen how you are at heart and in character and habits. For the most part marriages are tempestuous or criminal because people are not careful enough in yoking themselves together. Sometimes a mere nothing is sufficient, a mania or tenacious opinion upon some moral or religious point, no matter what, a gesture which displeases or some little fault or disagreeable quality, to turn an affianced couple, however tender and affectionate, into a pair of irreconcilable enemies, incensed with, but chained to, each other until death. I will not marry, sir, without knowing the depths and corners and recesses of the soul of the man with whom I am to share my existence. I wish to study him at leisure, at least for some months.

"Here is what I propose. You will come and pass the summer in my house at De Lauville, my country place, and we shall see then if we are fitted to live side by side—I see you laugh! You have a bad thought. Oh, sir, if I were not sure of myself I would never make this proposition. I have for love, what you call love, you men, such a scorn, such a disgust, that a fall is impossible for me. Well, do you accept?"

I kissed her hand.

"When shall we start, madame?"

"The tenth of May."

"It is agreed."

A month later I was installed at her house. She was truly a singular woman. From morning until evening she was studying me. As she was fond of horses, we passed each day in riding through the wood, talking about everything, but she was always trying to probe my innermost thoughts, to which end she observed my slightest movement.

As for me, I became foolishly in love and did not trouble myself about the fitness of our characters. But I soon perceived that even my sleep was put under inspection. Someone slept in a little room adjoining mine, entering very late and with infinite precaution. This espionage for every instant finally made me impatient. I wished to hasten the conclusion and one evening thought of a way of bringing it about. She had received me in such a way that I had abstained from any new essay, but a violent desire invaded me to make her pay in some fashion for this restricted regime to which I had submitted, and I thought I knew a way.

You know Cesarine, her chambermaid, a pretty girl from Granville, where all the women are pretty, and as blond as her mistress was brunette? Well, one afternoon I drew the little soubrette into my room and, putting a hundred francs in her hand, I said to her:

"My dear child, I do not wish you to do anything villainous, but I

desire the same privilege toward your mistress that she takes toward me."

The little maid laughed with a sly look as I continued:

"I am watched day and night, I know. I am watched as I eat, drink, dress myself, shave and put on my socks, and I know it."

The little girl stammered: "Yes sir." Then she was silent. I continued:

"You sleep in the room next to mine to see if I snore or if I dream aloud; you cannot deny it!"

"Yes sir." Then she was silent again.

I became excited. "Oh well, my girl," I said, "you understand that it is not fair for everything to be known about me, while I know nothing of the person who is to be my wife. I love her with all my soul. She has the face, the heart and mind that I have dreamed of, and I am the happiest of men on this account; nevertheless, there are some things I would like to know better."

Cesarine decided to put my bank note in her pocket. I understood that the bargain was concluded.

"Listen, my girl," I said. "We men—we care much for certain—certain details—physical details, which do not hinder a woman from being charming but which can change her price in our eyes. I do not ask you to say anything bad of your mistress or even to disclose to me her defects, if she has any. Only answer me frankly four or five questions, which I am going to put to you. You know Madame Jadelles as well as you do yourself, since you dress and undress her every day. Now then, tell me this: Is she as plump as she has the appearance of being?"

The little maid did not answer.

I continued: "You cannot, my child, be ignorant of the fact that women put cotton padding, you know, where—where—where they nourish their infants and also where they sit. Tell me, does she use padding?"

Cesarine lowered her eyes. Finally she said timidly: "Ask whatever you want to, sir, I will answer all at one time."

"Well, my girl, there are some women whose knees meet, so much so that they touch with each step that they take, and there are others who have them far apart, which makes their limbs like the arches of a bridge, so that one might view the landscape between them. This is the prettier of the two fashions. Tell me, how are your mistress's limbs?"

Still the maid said nothing.

I continued: "There are some who have necks so beautiful that they form a great fold underneath. And there are some that have large arms with a thin figure. There are some that are very large before and

nothing at all behind, and there are some large behind and nothing at all in front. All this is very pretty, very pretty, but I wish to know just how your mistress is made. Tell me frankly, and I will give you much more money."

Cesarine looked at me out of the corner of her eye and, laughing with all her heart, answered: "Sir, aside from being dark, Mistress is made exactly like me."

Then she fled.

I had been made sport of. This was the time I found myself ridiculous, and I resolved to avenge myself at least upon this impertinent maid.

An hour later I entered the little room with precaution, where she listened to my sleeping, and unscrewed the bolts.

Toward midnight she arrived at her post of observation. I followed her immediately. On perceiving me she was going to cry out, but I put my hand over her mouth and, without too great effort, I convinced myself that if she had not lied Mme Jadelle was very well made.

I even put much zest into this authentication which, though pushed a little far, did not seem to displease Cesarine. She was in very fact, a ravishing specimen of the Norman peasant race, strong and fine at the same time. She was wanting perhaps in certain delicate attentions that Henry VI would have scorned, but I revealed them to her quickly, and as I adore perfumes, I gave her a box the next evening with a flask of lavender water.

We were soon more closely bound to each other than I could have believed, almost friends. She became an exquisite mistress, naturally *spirituelle* and broken to pleasure. She had been a courtesan of great merit in Paris.

The delights which she brought me enabled me to await Mme Jadelle's conclusion of proof without impatience. I became an incomparable character, supple, docile and complacent. My fiancée found me delightful beyond a doubt, and I judged from certain signs that I was soon to be accepted. I was certainly the happiest man in the world, awaiting tranquilly the legal kiss of the woman I loved, in the arms of a young and beautiful girl for whom I had much fondness.

It is here, madame, that I must ask your forbearance a little; I have arrived at a delicate point.

One evening as we were returning from a horseback ride, Mme Jadelle complained sharply that her grooms had not taken certain measures prescribed by her for the horse she rode. She repeated many times: "Let them take care, I have a way of surprising them."

I passed a calm night in my bed. I awoke early, full of ardor and energy. Then I dressed myself.

I was in the habit of going up on the tower of the house each morning to smoke a cigarette. This was reached by a limestone staircase lighted by a large window at the top of the first story.

I advanced without noise, my feet encased in morocco slippers with wadded soles, and was climbing the first steps when I perceived Cesarine bending out the window, looking down below.

Not that I saw Cesarine entirely, but only a part of Cesarine, and that the lower part. I loved this part just as much; of Mme Jadelles I would have preferred, perhaps, the upper. She was thus so charming, so round, this part which offered itself to me, and only slightly clothed in a white skirt.

I approached so softly that the girl heard nothing. I put myself on my knees; with infinite precaution I took hold of the two sides of the skirt and, quickly, I raised it. I recognized there the full, fresh, plump, sweet ischial tuberosities of my mistress and threw there—your pardon, madame—I threw there a tender kiss, a kiss of a lover who dares anything.

I was surprised. It was verbenal But I had no time for reflection. I received a sudden blow, or rather a push in the face which seemed to break my nose. I uttered a cry that made my hair rise. The person had turned around—it was Mme Jadelles!

She was fighting the air with her hands, like a woman who had lost consciousness. She gasped for some seconds, made a gesture of using a horsewhip and then fled.

Ten minutes later Cesarine, stupefied, brought me in a letter. I read: *Mme Jadelles hopes that M. de Brives will immediately rid her of his presence.*

I departed. Well, I am not yet consoled. I have attempted every means and all explanations to obtain a pardon for my misunderstanding, but all proceedings have been nipped in the bud.

Since that moment, you see, I have in my—in my heart a scent of verbenal which gives me an immoderate desire to smell the perfume again.

CHÂLI

ADMIRAL DE LA VALLÉE, who seemed to be half asleep in his armchair, said in a voice which sounded like an old woman's:

"I had a very singular little love adventure once; would you like to hear it?"

He spoke from the depths of his great armchair with that everlasting dry, wrinkled smile on his lips, that smile à la Voltaire, which made people take him for a terrible skeptic.

I

"I was thirty years of age and a first lieutenant in the navy, when I was intrusted with an astronomical expedition to Central India. The English government provided me with all the necessary means for carrying out my enterprise, and I was soon busied with a few followers in that vast, strange, surprising country.

"It would take me ten volumes to relate that journey. I went through wonderfully magnificent regions, was received by strangely handsome princes and was entertained with incredible magnificence. For two months it seemed to me as if I were walking in a fairy kingdom on the back of imaginary elephants. In the midst of wild forests I discovered extraordinary ruins, delicate and chiseled like jewels, fine as lace and enormous as mountains, those fabulous, divine monuments which are so graceful that one falls in love with their form as with a woman, feeling a physical and sensual pleasure in looking at them. As Victor Hugo says, 'Whilst wide awake I was walking in a dream.'

"Toward the end of my journey I reached Ganhard, which was formerly one of the most prosperous towns in Central India but is now much decayed. It is governed by a wealthy, arbitrary, violent, generous and cruel prince. His name is Rajah Maddan, a true oriental potentate, delicate and barbarous, affable and sanguinary, combining feminine grace with pitiless ferocity.

"The city lies at the bottom of a valley, on the banks of a little lake surrounded by pagodas which bathe their walls in the water. At a distance the city looks like a white spot which grows larger as one approaches it, and by degrees you discover the domes and spires, the slender and graceful summits of Indian monuments.

"At about an hour's distance from the gates I met a superbly caparisoned elephant surrounded by a guard of honor which the sovereign had sent me, and I was conducted to the palace with great ceremony.

"I should have liked to have taken the time to put on my gala uniform, but royal impatience would not admit of it. He was anxious to make my acquaintance, to know what he might expect from me.

"I was ushered into a great hall surrounded by galleries, in the midst of bronze-colored soldiers in splendid uniforms, while all about were standing men dressed in striking robes, studded with precious stones.

"I saw a shining mass, a kind of setting sun reposing on a bench like our garden benches without a back; it was the rajah who was

waiting for me, motionless, in a robe of the purest canary color. He had some ten or fifteen million francs' worth of diamonds on him, and by itself, on his forehead, glistened the famous star of Delhi, which has always belonged to the illustrious dynasty of the Pariharas of Munderore, from whom my host was descended.

"He was a man of about five and twenty, who seemed to have some Negro blood in his veins, although he belonged to the purest Hindu race. He had large, almost motionless, rather vague eyes, fat lips, a curly beard, low forehead and dazzling sharp white teeth, which he frequently showed with a mechanical smile. He got up and gave me his hand in the English fashion and then made me sit down beside him on a bench which was so high that my feet hardly touched the ground and on which I was very uncomfortable.

"He immediately proposed a tiger hunt for the next day; war and hunting were his chief occupations, and he could hardly understand how one could care for anything else. He was evidently fully persuaded that I had only come all that distance to amuse him a little and to be the companion of his pleasures.

"As I stood greatly in need of his assistance, I tried to flatter his tastes, and he was so pleased with me that he immediately wished to show me how his trained boxers fought and led the way into a kind of arena situated within the palace.

"At his command two naked men appeared, their hands covered with steel claws. They immediately began to attack each other, trying to strike one another with these sharp weapons which left long cuts from which the blood flowed freely down their dark skins.

"It lasted for a long time, till their bodies were a mass of wounds, and the combatants were tearing each other's flesh with these pointed blades. One of them had his jaw smashed, while the ear of the other was split into three pieces.

"The prince looked on with ferocious pleasure, uttered grunts of delight and imitated all their movements with careless gestures, crying out constantly:

"'Strike, strike hard!'

"One fell down unconscious and had to be carried out of the arena, covered with blood, while the rajah uttered a sigh of regret because it was over so soon.

"He turned to me to know my opinion; I was disgusted, but I congratulated him loudly. He then gave orders that I was to be conducted to Kuch-Mahal (the palace of pleasure), where I was to be lodged.

"This bijou palace was situated at the extremity of the royal park, and one of its walls was built into the sacred lake of Vihara. It was

square, with three rows of galleries with colonnades of most beautiful workmanship. At each angle there were light, lofty or low towers, standing either singly or in pairs; no two were alike, and they looked like flowers growing out of that graceful plant of oriental architecture. All were surmounted by fantastic roofs, like coquettish ladies' caps.

"In the middle of the edifice a large dome raised its round cupola, like a woman's bosom, beside a beautiful clock tower.

"The whole building was covered with sculpture from top to bottom, with exquisite arabesques which delighted the eye, motionless processions of delicate figures whose attitudes and gestures in stone told the story of Indian manners and customs.

"The rooms were lighted by windows with dentelated arches, looking on to the gardens. On the marble floor were designs of graceful bouquets in onyx, lapis lazuli and agate.

"I had scarcely had time to finish my toilet when Haribada, a court dignitary who was specially charged to communicate between the prince and me, announced his sovereign's visit.

"The saffron-colored rajah appeared, again shook hands with me and began to tell me a thousand different things, constantly asking me for my opinion, which I had great difficulty in giving him. Then he wished to show me the ruins of the former palace at the other extremity of the gardens.

"It was a real forest of stones inhabited by a large tribe of apes. On our approach the males began to run along the walls, making the most hideous faces at us, while the females ran away, carrying off their young in their arms. The rajah shouted with laughter and pinched my arm to draw my attention and to testify his own delight and sat down in the midst of the ruins, while around us, squatting on the top of the walls, perching on every eminence, a number of animals with white whiskers put out their tongues and shook their fists at us.

"When he had seen enough of this the yellow rajah rose and began to walk sedately on, keeping me always at his side, happy at having shown me such things on the very day of my arrival and reminding me that a grand tiger hunt was to take place the next day in my honor.

"I was present at it, at a second, a third, at ten, twenty in succession. We hunted all the animals which the country produces in turn: the panther, the bear, elephant, antelope and the crocodile—half the beasts in creation, I should say. I was disgusted at seeing so much blood flow and tired of this monotonous pleasure.

"At length the prince's ardor abated and, at my urgent request, he left me a little leisure for work, contenting himself by loading me with costly presents. He sent me jewels, magnificent stuffs, and well-broken

animals of all sorts, which Haribada presented to me with apparently as grave respect as if I had been the sun himself, although he heartily despised me at the bottom of his heart.

"Every day a procession of servants brought me, in covered dishes, a portion of each course that was served at the royal table. Every day he seemed to take an extreme pleasure in getting up some new entertainment for me—dances by the bayaderes, jugglers, reviews of the troops—and I was obliged to pretend to be most delighted with it so as not to hurt his feelings when he wished to show me his wonderful country in all its charm and all its splendor.

"As soon as I was left alone for a few moments I either worked or went to see the monkeys, whose company pleased me a great deal better than that of their royal master.

"One evening, however, on coming back from a walk, I found Haribada outside the gate of my palace. He told me in mysterious tones that a gift from the king was waiting for me in my abode, and he said that his master begged me to excuse him for not having sooner thought of offering me that of which I had been deprived for such a long time.

"After these obscure remarks the ambassador bowed and withdrew.

"When I went in I saw six little girls standing against the wall, motionless, side by side, like smelts on a skewer. The eldest was perhaps ten and the youngest eight years old. For the first moment I could not understand why this girls' school had taken up its abode in my rooms; then, however, I divined the prince's delicate attention: he had made me a present of a harem and had chosen it very young from an excess of generosity. There the more unripe the fruit is, in the higher estimation it is held.

"For some time I remained confused, embarrassed and ashamed in the presence of these children who looked at me with great grave eyes which seemed already to divine what I might want of them.

"I did not know what to say to them; I felt inclined to send them back, but I could not return the presents of a prince; it would have been a mortal insult. I was obliged, therefore, to install this troop of children in my palace.

"They stood motionless, looking at me, waiting for my orders, trying to read my thoughts in my eyes. Confound such a present! How absurdly it was in my way. At last, thinking that I must be looking rather ridiculous, I asked the eldest her name.

"'Châli,' she replied.

"This little creature, with her beautiful skin which was slightly yellow, like old ivory, was a marvel, a perfect statue, with her face and its long and severe lines.

"I then asked, in order to see what she would reply and also, perhaps, to embarrass her:

"What have you come here for?"

"She replied in her soft, harmonious voice: 'I have come to be altogether at my lord's disposal and to do whatever he wishes.' She was evidently quite resigned.

"I put the same question to the youngest, who answered immediately in her shrill voice:

"I am here to do whatever you ask me, my master."

"This one was like a little mouse and was very taking, just as they all were, so I took her in my arms and kissed her. The others made a movement to go away, thinking, no doubt, that I had made my choice, but I ordered them to stay and, sitting down in the Indian fashion, I made them all sit round me and began to tell them fairy tales, for I spoke their language tolerably well.

"They listened very attentively and trembled, wringing their hands in agony. Poor little things, they were not thinking any longer of the reason why they were sent to me.

"When I had finished my story I called Latchmân, my confidential servant, and made him bring sweetmeats and cakes, of which they ate enough to make themselves ill. Then, as I began to find the adventure rather funny, I organized games to amuse my wives.

"One of these diversions had an enormous success. I made a bridge of my legs, and the six children ran underneath, the smallest beginning and the tallest always knocking against them a little, because she did not stoop enough. It made them shout with laughter, and these young voices sounding through the low vaults of my sumptuous palace seemed to wake it up and to people it with childlike gaiety and life.

"Next I took great interest in seeing to the sleeping apartments of my innocent concubines, and in the end I saw them safely locked up under the surveillance of four female servants whom the prince had sent me at the same time, in order to take care of my sultanas.

"For a week I took the greatest pleasure in acting the part of a father toward these living dolls. We had capital games of hide-and-seek and puss in the corner, which gave them the greatest pleasure. Every day I taught them a new game to their intense delight.

"My house now seemed to be one large nursery, and my little friends, dressed in beautiful silk stuffs and in materials embroidered with gold and silver, ran up and down the long galleries and the quiet rooms like little human animals.

"Châli was an adorable little creature, timid and gentle, who soon got to love me ardently, with some degree of shame, with hesitation,

as if afraid of European morality, with reserve and scruples and yet with passionate tenderness. I cherished her as if I had been her father.

"The others continued to play in the palace like a lot of happy kittens, but Châli never left me except when I went to the prince.

"We passed delicious hours together in the ruins of the old castle, among the monkeys, who had become our friends.

"She used to lie on my knees and remain there, turning all sorts of things over in her little sphinx's head, or perhaps not thinking of anything, retaining that beautiful, charming, hereditary pose of that noble and dreamy people, the hieratic pose of the sacred statues.

"In a large brass dish I had one day brought provisions, cakes, fruits. The apes came nearer and nearer, followed by their young ones, who were more timid; at last they sat down round us in a circle without daring to come any nearer, waiting for me to distribute my delicacies. Then almost invariably a male more daring than the rest would come to me with outstretched hand, like a beggar, and I would give him something which he would take to his wife. All the others immediately began to utter furious cries, cries of rage and jealousy, and I could not make the terrible racket cease except by throwing each one his share.

"As I was very comfortable in the ruins, I had my instruments brought there so that I might be able to work. As soon, however, as they saw the copper fittings on my scientific instruments, the monkeys, no doubt taking them for some deadly engines, fled on all sides, uttering the most piercing cries.

"I often spent my evenings with Châli on one of the external galleries that looked on to the lake of Vihara. One night in silence we looked at the bright moon gliding over the sky, throwing a mantle of trembling silver over the water and, on the further shore, upon the row of small pagodas like carved mushrooms with their stalks in the water. Taking the thoughtful head of my little mistress between my hands, I printed a long, soft kiss on her polished brow, on her great eyes which were full of the secret of that ancient and fabulous land and on her calm lips which opened to my caress. I felt a confused, powerful, above all a poetical, sensation, the sensation that I possessed a whole race in this little girl, that mysterious race from which all the others seem to have taken their origin.

"The prince, however, continued to load me with presents. One day he sent me a very unexpected object which excited a passionate admiration in Châli. It was merely one of those cardboard boxes, covered with shells stuck on outside, which can be bought at any European seaside resort for a penny or two. But there it was a jewel beyond price, and, no doubt, was the first that had found its way into the king-

dom. I put it on a table and left it there, wondering at the value which was set upon this trumpery article out of a bazaar.

"But Châli never got tired of looking at it, of admiring it ecstatically. From time to time she would say to me, 'May I touch it?' And when I had given her permission she raised the lid, closed it again with the greatest precaution, touched the shells very gently, and the contact seemed to give her real physical pleasure.

"However, I had finished my scientific work, and it was time for me to return. I was a long time in making up my mind, kept back by my tenderness for my little friend, but at last I was obliged to fix the day of my departure.

"The prince got up fresh hunting excursions and fresh wrestling matches, and after a fortnight of these pleasures I declared that I could stay no longer, and he gave me my liberty.

"My farewell from Châli was heart-rending. She wept, lying beside me with her head on my breast, shaken with sobs. I did not know how to console her; my kisses were no good.

"All at once an idea struck me and, getting up, I went and got the shell box and, putting it into her hands, I said, 'That is for you; it is yours.'

"Then I saw her smile at first. Her whole face was lighted up with internal joy, with that profound joy which comes when impossible dreams are suddenly realized, and she embraced me ardently.

"All the same she wept bitterly when I bade her a last farewell.

"I gave paternal kisses and cakes to all the rest of my wives, and then I left for home.

II

"Two years had passed when my duties again called me to Bombay, and because I knew the country and the language well, I was left there to undertake another mission.

"I finished what I had to do as quickly as possible, and as I had a considerable amount of spare time on my hands, I determined to go and see my friend Rajah Maddan and my dear little Châli once more, though I expected to find her much changed.

"The rajah received me with every demonstration of pleasure and hardly left me for a moment during the first day of my visit. At night, however, when I was alone I sent for Haribada, and after several misleading questions I said to him:

"Do you know what has become of little Châli whom the rajah gave me?"

"He immediately assumed a sad and troubled look and said, in evident embarrassment:

"We had better not speak of her."

"Why? She was a dear little woman."

"She turned out badly, sir."

"What--Châli? What has become of her? Where is she?"

"I mean to say that she came to a bad end."

"A bad end! Is she dead?"

"Yes. She committed a very dreadful action."

"I was very much distressed. I felt my heart beat; my breast was oppressed with grief, and I insisted on knowing what she had done and what had happened to her."

"The man became more and more embarrassed and murmured: 'You had better not ask about it.'"

"But I want to know."

"She stole——"

"Who—Châli? What did she steal?"

"Something that belonged to you."

"To me? What do you mean?"

"The day you left she stole that little box which the prince had given you; it was found in her hands."

"What box are you talking about?"

"The box covered with shells."

"But I gave it to her."

"The Hindu looked at me with stupefaction and then replied: 'Well, she declared with the most sacred oaths that you had given it to her, but nobody could believe that you could have given a king's present to a slave, and so the rajah had her punished.'"

"How was she punished? What was done to her?"

"She was tied up in a sack and thrown into the lake from this window, from the window of the room in which we are, where she had committed the theft."

"I felt the most terrible grief that I ever experienced and made a sign to Haribada to go away so that he might not see my tears. I spent the night on the gallery which looked on to the lake, on the gallery where I had so often held the poor child on my knees, and pictured to myself her pretty little body lying decomposed in a sack in the dark waters beneath me."

"The next day I left again, in spite of the rajah's entreaties and evident vexation, and I now still feel as if I had never loved any woman but Châli."

JEROBOAM

ANYONE WHO SAID, or even insinuated, that the Reverend William Greenfield, vicar of St. Sampson's, Tottenham, did not make his wife Anna perfectly happy, would certainly have been very malicious. In their twelve years of married life he had honored her with twelve children, and could anybody ask more of a saintly man?

Saintly even to heroism, in truth! For his wife Anna, who was endowed with invaluable virtues, which made her a model among wives and a paragon among mothers, had not been equally endowed physically. In one word, she was hideous. Her hair, which though thin was coarse, was the color of the national half-and-half, but of thick half-and-half which looked as if it had been already swallowed several times. Her complexion, which was muddy and pimply, looked as if it were covered with sand mixed with brick dust. Her teeth, which were long and protruding, seemed to start out of their sockets in order to escape from that almost lipless mouth whose sulphurous breath had turned them yellow. Evidently Anna suffered from bile.

Her china-blue eyes looked different ways, one very much to the right and the other very much to the left, with a frightened squint, no doubt in order that they might not see her nose, of which they felt ashamed. They were quite right! Thin, soft, long, pendent, sallow and ending in a violent knob, it irresistibly reminded those who saw it of something both ludicrous and indescribable. Her body, through the inconceivable irony of nature, was at the same time thin and flabby, wooden and chubby, without either the elegance of slimness or the rounded curves of stoutness. It might have been taken for a body which had formerly been fat but which had now grown thin, while the covering had remained stretched on the framework.

She was evidently nothing but skin and bone, but had too much bone and too little skin.

It will be seen that the reverend gentleman had done his duty, his whole duty, in fact, more than his duty, in sacrificing a dozen times on this altar. Yes, a dozen times bravely and loyally! His wife could not deny it or dispute the number, because the children were there to prove it. A dozen times, and not one less!

And, alas! Not once more. This was the reason why, in spite of appearances, Mrs. Anna Greenfield ventured to think, in the depths of her heart, that the Reverend William Greenfield, vicar of St. Sampson's,

Tottenham, had not made her perfectly happy. She thought so all the more as, for four years now, she had been obliged to renounce all hope of that annual sacrifice which had been so easy and so regular formerly, but which had now fallen into disuse. In fact, at the birth of her twelfth child the reverend gentleman had expressly said to her:

"God has greatly blessed our union, my dear Anna. We have reached the sacred number of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Were we now to persevere in the works of the flesh, it would be mere debauchery, and I cannot suppose that you would wish me to end my exemplary life in lustful practices."

His wife blushed and looked down, and the holy man, with that legitimate pride of virtue which is its own reward, audibly thanked heaven that he was "not as other men are."

A model among wives and a paragon of mothers, Anna lived with him for four years on those terms without complaining to anyone. She contented herself by praying fervently to God that He would inspire her husband with the desire to begin a second series of the Twelve Tribes. At times even, in order to make her prayers more efficacious, she tried to compass that end by culinary means. She spared no pains and gorged the reverend gentleman with highly seasoned dishes—hare soup, oxtails stewed in sherry, the green fat in turtle soup, stewed mushrooms, Jerusalem artichokes, celery and horse-radish, hot sauces, truffles, hashes with wine and cayenne pepper in them, curried lobsters, pies made of cocks' combs, oysters and the soft roe of fish. These dishes were washed down by strong beer and generous wines, Scotch ale, burgundy, dry champagne, brandy, whisky and gin—in a word, by that numberless array of alcoholic drinks with which the English people love to heat their blood.

As a matter of fact, the reverend gentleman's blood became very heated, as was shown by his nose and cheeks. But in spite of this the powers above were inexorable, and he remained quite indifferent as regards his wife, who was unhappy and thoughtful at the sight of that protruding nasal appendage which, alas, was alone in its glory.

She became thinner and, at the same time, flabbier than ever. She almost began to lose her trust in God, when suddenly she had an inspiration: Was it not, perhaps, the work of the devil?

She did not care to inquire too closely into the matter, as she thought it a very good idea. It was this:

Go to the Universal Exhibition in Paris, and there, perhaps, you will discover how to make yourself loved.

Decidedly luck favored her, for her husband immediately gave her permission to go. As soon as she got into the Esplanade des Invalides she saw the Algerian dancers and said to herself:

"Surely this would inspire William with the desire to be the father of the thirteenth tribe!"

But how could she manage to get him to be present at such abominable orgies? For she could not hide from herself that it was an abominable exhibition, and she knew how scandalized he would be at their voluptuous movements. She had no doubt that the devil had led her there, but she could not take her eyes off the scene, and it gave her an idea. So for nearly a fortnight you might have seen the poor, unattractive woman sitting and attentively and curiously watching the swaying hips of the Algerian women. She was learning.

The evening of her return to London she rushed into her husband's bedroom, disrobed herself in an instant, retaining only a thin gauze covering, and for the first time in her life appeared before him in all the ugliness of semi-nudity.

"Come, come," the saintly man stammered out, "are you—are you mad, Anna? What demon possesses you? Why inflict the disgrace of such a spectacle on me?"

But she did not listen to him, did not reply, and suddenly began to sway her hips about like an *almah*.¹ The reverend gentleman could not believe his eyes; in his stupefaction he did not think of covering them with his hands or even of shutting them. He looked at her, stupefied and dumfounded, a prey to the hypnotism of ugliness. He watched her as she advanced and retired, as she swayed and skipped and wriggled and postured in extraordinary attitudes. For a long time he sat motionless and almost unable to speak. He only said in a low voice:

"Oh lord! To think that twelve times—twelve times—a whole dozen!"

Then she fell into a chair, panting and worn out and saying to herself:

"Thank heaven! William looks as he used to do formerly on the days that he honored me. Thank heaven! There will be a thirteenth tribe, and then a fresh series of tribes, for William is very methodical in all that he does!"

But William merely took a blanket off the bed and threw it over her, saying in a voice of thunder:

"Your name is no longer Anna, Mrs. Greenfield; for the future you shall be called Jezebel. I only regret that I have twelve times mingled my blood with your impure blood." And then, seized by pity, he added: "If you were only in a state of inebriety, of intoxication, I could excuse you."

"Oh, William!" she exclaimed repentantly, "I am in that state. Forgive me, William—forgive a poor drunken woman!"

"I will forgive you, Anna," he replied, and he pointed to a wash-basin, saying: "Cold water will do you good, and when your head is

¹ Egyptian dancing girl.—(TRANSLATOR.)

clear remember the lesson which you must learn from this occurrence."

"What lesson?" she asked humbly.

"That people ought never to depart from their usual habits."

"But why then, William," she asked timidly, "have you changed your habits?"

"Hold your tongue!" he cried. "Hold your tongue, Jezebel! Have you not got over your intoxication yet? For twelve years I certainly followed the divine precept: 'increase and multiply,' once a year. But since then I have grown accustomed to something else, and I do not wish to alter my habits."

And the Reverend William Greenfield, vicar of St. Sampson's, Tottenham, the saintly man whose blood was inflamed by heating food and liquor, whose ears were like full-blown poppies and who had a nose like a tomato, left his wife and, as had been his habit for four years, went to make love to Polly, the servant.

"Now, Polly," he said, "you are a clever girl, and I mean through you to teach Mrs. Greenfield a lesson she will never forget. I will try and see what I can do for you."

And to accomplish this he took her to Mrs. Greenfield, called the latter his little Jezebel and said to her with an unctuous smile:

"Call me Jeroboam! You don't understand why? Neither do I, but that does not matter. Take off all your things, Polly, and show yourself to Mrs. Greenfield."

The servant did as she was bidden, and the result was that Mrs. Greenfield never again hinted to her husband the desirability of laying the foundations of a thirteenth tribe.

VIRTUE IN THE BALLET

IT IS A STRANGE FEELING of pleasure that the writer about the stage and about theatrical characters in general feels when he occasionally discovers a good, honest human heart in the twilight behind the scenes. Of all the witches and semi-witches of that eternal Walpurgis Night, whose boards represent the world, the ladies of the ballet have at all times and in all places been regarded at least like saints, although Hackländer repeatedly tried in vain in his earlier novels to convince us that true virtue appears in tights and short petticoats and is only to be found in ballet girls. I fear that the popular voice is right as a general rule, but it is equally true that here and there one finds a pearl in the dust

and even in the dirt. The short story that I am about to tell will best justify my assertion.

Whenever a new, youthful dancer appeared at the Vienna Opera House the habitués began to go after her and did not rest until the fresh young rose had been plucked by some hand or other, though often it was old and trembling. For how could those young and pretty, sometimes even beautiful, girls—with every right to life, love and pleasure, but poor and on a very small salary—resist the seduction of the smell of flowers and of the flash of diamonds? And if one resisted it, it was love, some real, strong passion that gave her the strength, generally, however, only to go after luxury all the more shamelessly and selfishly when her lover forsook her.

At the beginning of the winter season of 185— the pleasing news was spread among the habitués that a girl of dazzling beauty was going to appear very shortly in the ballet at the Court Theater. When the evening came nobody had yet seen the much-discussed phenomenon, but report spread her name from mouth to mouth. It was *Satanella*. The moment the troupe of elastic figures in fluttering petticoats jumped onto the stage every opera glass in the boxes and stalls was directed on the stage, and at the same instant the new dancer was discovered, although she timidly kept in the background.

She was one of those girls who seem crowned with the bright halo of virginity but at the same time present a splendid type of womanhood. She had the voluptuous form of Ruben's second wife, whom they called, not untruly, a reincarnated Helen, and her head with its delicate nose, its small, full mouth and its dark, inquiring eyes reminded people of the celebrated picture of the Flemish Venus in the Belvedere in Vienna.

She took the old guard of the Vienna Court Theater by storm, and the very next morning a perfect shower of billets-doux, jewels and bouquets fell into the poor ballet girl's attic. For a moment she was dazzled by all this splendor and looked at the gold bracelets, the brooches set with rubies and emeralds, and at the sparkling earrings, with flushed cheeks. Then an unspeakable terror of being lost and of sinking into degradation seized her, and she pushed the jewels away and was about to send them back. But as is usual in such cases, her mother intervened in favor of the generous gentlemen, and so the jewels were accepted, but the notes which accompanied them were not answered. A second and a third discharge of Cupid's artillery followed without making any impression on that virtuous girl; in consequence a great number of her admirers grew quiet, though some continued to send her presents and to assail her with love letters. One had the courage to go still farther.

He was a wealthy banker who had called on the mother of Henrietta, as we shall call the fair-haired ballet girl, and then one evening, quite unexpectedly, on the girl herself. He by no means met with the reception which he had expected from the pretty girl in the faded cotton gown. Henrietta treated him with a certain amount of good-humored respect, which had a much more unpleasant effect on him than that coldness and prudery which is often coexistent with coquetry and selfish speculation among a certain class of women. In spite of everything, however, he soon went to see her daily and lavished his wealth on the beautiful dancer without request on her part and gave her no chance of refusing, for he relied on the mother for everything. The mother took pretty, small apartments for her daughter and herself in the Kärntnerstrasse and furnished them elegantly, hired a cook and housemaid, made an arrangement with a fly driver, and lastly, clothed her daughter's lovely lines in silk, velvet and valuable lace.

Henrietta persistently held her tongue at all this; only once she said to her mother in the presence of the Stock Exchange Jupiter:

"Have you won a prize in the lottery?"

"Of course I have," her mother replied with a laugh.

The girl, however, had given away her heart long before, and, contrary to all precedent, to a man of whose very name she was ignorant, who sent her no diamonds and not even flowers. But he was young and good looking and stood, so retiringly and so evidently in love, at the small side door of the opera house every night when she got out of her antediluvian and rickety fly and also when she got into it again after the performance that she could not help noticing him. Soon he began to follow her wherever she went, and once he summoned up courage to speak to her, when she had been to see a friend in a remote suburb. He was very nervous, but she thought all that he said very clear and logical, and she did not hesitate for a moment to confess that she returned his love.

"You have made me the happiest and at the same time the most wretched of men," he said after a pause.

"What do you mean?" she said innocently.

"Do you not belong to another man?" he asked her in a sad voice. She shook her abundant light curls.

"Up till now I have belonged to myself alone, and I will prove it to you by requesting you to call upon me frequently and without restraint. Everyone shall know that we are lovers. I am not ashamed of belonging to an honorable man, but I will not sell myself."

"But your splendid apartments and your dresses," her lover interposed shyly; "you cannot pay for them out of your salary."

"My mother has won a large prize in the lottery or made a hit on the

Stock Exchange." And with these words the determined girl cut short all further explanations.

That same evening the young man paid his first visit, to the horror of the girl's mother who was so devoted to the Stock Exchange, and he came again the next day and nearly every day. Her mother's reproaches were of no more avail than Jupiter's furious looks, and when the latter one day asked for an explanation as to certain visits, the girl said proudly:

"That is very soon explained. He loves me as I love him, and I presume you can guess the rest."

And he certainly did guess the rest and disappeared, and with him the shower of gold ceased.

The mother cried and the daughter laughed. "I never gave the worn-out old rake any hopes, and what does it matter to me what bargain you made with him? I always thought that you had been lucky on the Stock Exchange. Now, however, we must seriously consider about giving up our apartments and make up our minds to live as we did before."

"Are you really capable of making such a sacrifice for me, to renounce luxury and to have my poverty?" her lover said.

"Certainly I am! Is not that a matter of course when one loves?" the ballet girl replied in surprise.

"Then let me inform you, my dear Henrietta," he said, "that I am not so poor as you think; I only wished to find out whether I could make myself loved for my own sake, and I have done so. I am Count L——, and though I am a minor and dependent on my parents, yet I have enough to be able to retain your pretty rooms for you and to offer you, if not a luxurious, at any rate a comfortable existence."

On hearing this the mother dried her tears immediately. Count L—— became the girl's acknowledged lover, and they passed the happiest hours together. Unselfish as the girl was, she was yet such a thoroughly ingenuous Viennese that whenever she saw anything that took her fancy, whether it was a dress, a cloak or one of those pretty little ornaments for a side table, she used to express her admiration in such terms as forced her lover to make her a present of the object in question. In this way Count L—— incurred enormous debts, which his father paid repeatedly; at last, however, he inquired into the cause of all this extravagance, and when he discovered it he gave his son the choice of giving up his connection with the dancer or of relinquishing all claims on the paternal money box.

It was a sorrowful evening when Count L—— told his mistress of his father's determination.

"If I do not give you up I shall be able to do nothing for you," he

said at last, "and I shall not even know how I should manage to live myself, for my father is just the man to allow me to want if I defy him. That, however, is a very secondary consideration, but as a man of honor, I cannot bind you, who have every right to luxury and enjoyment, to myself from the moment when I cannot even keep you from want, and so I must set you at liberty."

"But I will not give you up," Henrietta said proudly.

The young count shook his head sadly.

"Do you love me?" the ballet girl said quickly.

"More than my life."

"Then we will not separate, as long as I have anything," she continued.

And she would not give up her connection with him, and when his father actually turned Count L—— into the street she took her lover into her own lodgings. He obtained a situation as a copying clerk in a lawyer's office, and she sold her valuable dresses and jewels. Thus they lived for more than a year.

The young man's father did not appear to trouble his head about them but, nevertheless, he knew everything that went on in their small home and knew every article that the ballet girl sold. At last, softened by such love and strength of character, he himself made the first advances to a reconciliation with his son.

At the present time Henrietta wears the diamonds which formerly belonged to the old countess, and it is long since she was a ballet girl. Now she sits by the side of her husband in a carriage on whose panels their armorial bearings are painted.

THE DOUBLE PINS

AH, MY DEAR FELLOW, what jades women are!"

"What makes you say that?"

"Because they have played me an abominable trick."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"Women or a woman?"

"Two women."

"Two women at once?"

"Yes."

"What was the trick?"

The two young men were sitting outside a café on the boulevard

and drinking liqueurs mixed with water, those aperients which look like infusions of all the tints in a box of water colors. They were nearly the same age: twenty-five to thirty. One was dark and the other fair, and they had the same semi-elegant look of stockjobbers, of men who go to the Stock Exchange and into drawing rooms, who are to be seen everywhere, who live everywhere and love everywhere. The dark one continued:

"I have told you of my connection with that little woman, a tradesman's wife, whom I met on the beach at Dieppe?"

"Yes."

"My dear fellow, you know how it is. I had a mistress in Paris whom I love dearly, an old friend, a good friend, who is virtually a habit, in fact, one I value very much."

"Your habit?"

"Yes, my habit and hers also. She is married to an excellent man, whom I also value very much, a very cordial fellow and a capital companion! I may say that my life is bound up with that house."

"Well?"

"Well! They could not manage to leave Paris, and I found myself a widower at Dieppe."

"Why did you go to Dieppe?"

"For a change of air. One cannot remain on the boulevards the whole time."

"And then?"

"Then I met the little woman I mentioned to you on the beach there."

"The wife of that head of a public office?"

"Yes, she was dreadfully dull; her husband only came every Sunday, and he is horrible! I understood her perfectly, and we laughed and danced together."

"And the rest?"

"Yes, but that came later. However, we met and we liked each other. I told her I liked her, and she made me repeat it so that she might understand it better, and she put no obstacles in my way."

"Did you love her?"

"Yes, a little! She is very nice."

"And what about the other?"

"The other was in Paris! Well, for six weeks it was very pleasant, and we returned here on the best of terms. Do you know how to break with a woman when that woman has not wronged you in any way?"

"Yes, perfectly well."

"How do you manage it?"

"I give her up."

"How do you do it?"

"I do not see her any longer."

"But supposing she comes to you?"

"I am not at home."

"And if she comes again?"

"I say I am not well."

"If she looks after you?"

"I play her some dirty trick."

"And if she puts up with it?"

"I write her husband anonymous letters so that he may look after her on the days that I expect her."

"That is serious! I cannot resist and do not know how to bring about a rupture, and so I have a collection of mistresses. There are some whom I do not see more than once a year, others every ten months, others on those days when they want to dine at a restaurant; those whom I have put at regular intervals do not worry me, but I often have great difficulty with the fresh ones so as to keep them at proper intervals."

"And then?"

"And then—then this little woman was all fire and flame, without any fault of mine, as I told you! As her husband spends all the whole day at the office, she began to come to me unexpectedly, and twice she nearly met my regular one on the stairs."

"The devil!"

"Yes; so I gave each of them her days, regular days, to avoid confusion. Saturday and Monday for the old one, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday for the new one."

"Why did you show her the preference?"

"Ah! My dear friend, she is younger."

"So that only gave you two days to yourself in a week."

"That is enough for one."

"Allow me to compliment you on that."

"Well, just fancy that the most ridiculous and most annoying thing in the world happened to me. For four months everything had been going on perfectly; I felt quite safe and I was really very happy, when suddenly, last Monday, the crash came.

"I was expecting my regular one at the usual time, a quarter past one, and was smoking a good cigar, dreaming, very well satisfied with myself, when I suddenly saw that it was past the time. I was much surprised, for she is very punctual, but I thought that something might have accidentally delayed her. However, half an hour passed,

then an hour, an hour and a half, and then I knew that something must have detained her—a sick headache, perhaps, or some annoying visitor. That sort of waiting is very vexatious, very annoying and enervating. At last I made up my mind to go out and, not knowing what to do, I went to her and found her reading a novel.

“‘Well,’ I said to her. And she replied quite calmly:

“‘My dear, I could not come; I was hindered.’

“‘How?’

“‘By something else.’

“‘What was it?’

“‘A very annoying visit.’

“I saw she would not tell me the true reason, and as she was very calm, I did not trouble myself any more about it, hoping to make up for lost time with the other next day. On the Tuesday I was very excited and amorous in expectation of the public official’s little wife, and I was surprised that she did not come before the appointed time. I looked at the clock every moment and watched the hands impatiently, but the quarter passed, then the half-hour, then two o’clock. I could not sit still any longer and walked up and down very soon in great strides, putting my face against the window and my ears to the door, to listen whether she was not coming upstairs.

“Half-past two, three o’clock! I seized my hat, rushed to her house. She was reading a novel, my dear fellow! ‘Well!’ I said anxiously, and she replied as calmly as usual:

“‘I was hindered and could not come.’

“‘By what?’

“‘An annoying visit.’

“Of course I immediately thought that they both knew everything, but she seemed so calm and quiet that I set aside my suspicions and thought it was only some strange coincidence, as I could not believe in such dissimulation on her part. And so after half an hour’s friendly talk, which was, however, interrupted a dozen times by her little girl coming in and out of the room, I went away very much annoyed. Just imagine the next day.”

“The same thing happened?”

“Yes, and the next also. And that went on for three weeks without any explanation, without anything explaining such strange conduct to me, the secret of which I suspected, however.”

“They knew everything?”

“I should think so, by George. But how? Ah! I had a great deal of anxiety before I found it out.”

“How did you manage it at last?”

"From their letters, for on the same day they both gave me their dismissal in identical terms."

"Well?"

"This is how it was: You know that women always have an array of pins about them. I know hairpins; I doubt them and look after them, but the others are much more treacherous, those confounded little black-headed pins which look all alike to us, great fools that we are, but which they can distinguish, just as we can distinguish a horse from a dog.

"Well, it appears that one day my official's little wife left one of those telltale instruments pinned to the paper close to my looking glass. My usual one had immediately seen this little black speck, no bigger than a flea, had taken it out without saying a word and had left one of her pins, which was also black but of a different pattern, in the same place.

"The next day the official's wife wished to recover her property and immediately recognized the substitution. Then her suspicions were aroused, and she put in two and crossed them. My original one replied to this telegraphic signal by three black pellets, one on the top of the other, and as soon as this method had begun they continued to communicate with one another without saying a word, just to spy on each other. Then it appears that the regular one, being bolder, wrapped a tiny piece of paper round the little wire point and wrote upon it:

"C. D., Poste Restante, Boulevard Malherbes.

"Then they wrote to each other. You understand that was not everything that passed between them. They set to work with precaution, with a thousand stratagems, with all the prudence that is necessary in such cases, but the regular one made a bold stroke and made an appointment with the other. I do not know what they said to each other; all that I know is that I had to pay the costs of their interview. There you have it all!"

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"And you do not see them any more?"

"I beg your pardon, I see them as friends, for we have not quarreled altogether."

"And have they met again?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, they have become intimate friends."

"And has not that given you an idea?"

"No, what idea?"

"You great booby! The idea of making them put back the pins where they found them."

HOW HE GOT THE LEGION OF HONOR

SOME PEOPLE are born with a predominant instinct, with some vocation or some desire which demands recognition as soon as they begin to speak or to think.

Ever since he was a child M. Caillard had only had one idea in his head—to be decorated. When he was still quite a small boy he used to wear a zinc Cross of the Legion of Honor in his tunic, just like other children wear a soldier's cap, and he took his mother's hand in the street with a proud look, sticking out his little chest with its red ribbon and metal star so that it might show to advantage.

His studies were not a success, and he failed in his examination for bachelor of arts; so not knowing what to do, he married a pretty girl, for he had plenty of money of his own.

They lived in Paris, like many rich middle-class people do, mixing with their own particular set without going among other people, proud of knowing a deputy, who might perhaps be a minister someday, while two chiefs of division were among his friends.

But M. Caillard could not get rid of his one absorbing idea, and he felt constantly unhappy because he had not the right to wear a little bit of colored ribbon in his buttonhole.

When he met any men who were decorated on the boulevards, he looked at them askance, with intense jealousy. Sometimes, when he had nothing to do in the afternoon, he could count them and say to himself: "Just let me see how many I shall meet between the Madeleine and the Rue Drouot."

Then he would walk slowly, looking at every coat with a practiced eye for the little bit of red ribbon, and when he had got to the end of his walk he always said the numbers out loud. "Eight officers and seventeen knights. As many as that! It is stupid to sow the cross broadcast in that fashion. I wonder how many I shall meet going back?"

And he returned slowly, unhappy when the crowd of passers-by interfered with his seeing them.

He knew the places where most of them were to be found. They swarmed in the Palais Royal. Fewer were seen in the Avenue de l'Opera than in the Rue de la Paix, while the right side of the boulevard was more frequented by them than the left.

They also seemed to prefer certain cafés and theaters. Whenever he saw a group of white-haired old gentlemen standing together in the middle of the pavement, interfering with the traffic, he used to say to himself: "They are officers of the Legion of Honor," and he felt inclined to take off his hat to them.

He had often remarked that the officers had a different bearing from mere knights. They carried their heads higher, and you felt that they enjoyed greater official consideration and a more widely extended importance.

Sometimes again the worthy man would be seized with a furious hatred for everyone who was decorated; he felt like a Socialist toward them. Then, when he got home, excited at meeting so many crosses—just like a poor, hungry wretch is on passing some dainty provision shop—he used to ask in a loud voice:

"When shall we get rid of this wretched government?" And his wife would be surprised and ask:

"What is the matter with you today?"

"I am indignant," he would reply, "at the injustice I see going on around us. Oh! The Communards were certainly right!"

After dinner he would go out again and look at the shops where all the decorations were sold and examine all the emblems of various shapes and colors. He would have liked to possess them all and to have walked gravely at the head of a procession with his crush hat under his arm and his breast covered with decorations, radiant as a star, amid a buzz of admiring whispers and a hum of respect. But alas! He had no right to wear any decoration whatever.

He used to say to himself: "It is really too difficult for any man to obtain the Legion of Honor unless he is some public functionary. Suppose I try to get appointed an officer of the Academy!"

But he did not know how to set about it and spoke to his wife on the subject, who was stupefied.

"Officer of the Academy! What have you done to deserve it?"

He got angry. "I know what I am talking about; I only want to know how to set about it. You are quite stupid at times."

She smiled. "You are quite right; I don't understand anything about it."

An idea struck him: "Suppose you were to speak to Monsieur Rosselin, the deputy, he might be able to advise me. You understand I cannot broach the subject to him directly. It is rather difficult and delicate but, coming from you, it might seem quite natural."

Mme Caillard did what he asked her, and M. Rosselin promised to speak to the minister about it. Then Caillard began to worry him till

the deputy told him he must make a formal application and put forward his claims.

"What were his claims?" he said. "He was not even a bachelor of arts."

However, he set to work and produced a pamphlet with the title, *The People's Right to Instruction*, but he could not finish it for want of ideas.

He sought for easier subjects and began several in succession. The first was, *The Instruction of Children by Means of the Eye*. He wanted gratuitous theaters to be established in every poor quarter of Paris for little children. Their parents were to take them there when they were quite young, and by means of a magic lantern all the notions of human knowledge were to be imparted to them. There were to be regular courses. The sight would educate the mind, while the pictures would remain impressed on the brain, and thus science would, so to say, be made visible. What could be more simple than to teach universal history, natural history, geography, botany, zoology, anatomy, etc., etc., thus?

He had his ideas printed in tract form and sent a copy to each deputy, ten to each minister, fifty to the president of the Republic, ten to each Parisian and five to each provincial newspaper.

Then he wrote on *Street Lending Libraries*. His idea was to have little carts full of books drawn about the streets, like orange carts are. Every householder or lodger would have a right to ten volumes a month by means of a halfpenny subscription.

"The people," M. Caillard said, "will only disturb itself for the sake of its pleasures, and since it will not go to instruction, instruction must come to it," etc., etc.

His essays attracted no attention, but he sent in his application and he got the usual formal official reply. He thought himself sure of success, but nothing came of it.

Then he made up his mind to apply personally. He begged for an interview with the minister of public instruction, and he was received by a young subordinate, already very grave and important, who kept touching the buttons of electric bells to summon ushers and footmen and officials inferior to himself. He declared to M. Caillard that his matter was going on quite favorably and advised him to continue his remarkable labors. So M. Caillard set at it again.

M. Rosselin, the deputy, seemed now to take a great interest in his success and gave him a lot of excellent, practical advice. Rosselin was decorated, although nobody knew exactly what he had done to deserve such a distinction.

He told Caillard what new studies he ought to undertake; he introduced him to learned societies which took up particularly obscure points of science, in the hope of gaining credit and honors thereby, and he even took him under his wing at the Ministry.

One day when he came to lunch with his friend (for several months past he had constantly taken his meals there), he said to him in a whisper as he shook hands: "I have just obtained a great favor for you. The Committee on Historical Works is going to intrust you with a commission. There are some researches to be made in various libraries in France."

Caillard was so delighted that he could scarcely eat or drink, and a week later he set out. He went from town to town, studying catalogues, rummaging in lofts full of dusty volumes, and was a bore to all the librarians.

One day, happening to be at Rouen, he thought he should like to embrace his wife, whom he had not seen for more than a week, so he took the nine o'clock train, which would land him at home by twelve at night.

He had his latchkey, so he went in without making any noise, delighted at the idea of the surprise he was going to give her. She had locked herself in. How tiresome! However, he cried out through the door:

"Jeanne, it is I."

She must have been very frightened, for he heard her jump out of bed and speak to herself, as if she were in a dream. Then she went to her dressing room, opened and closed the door and went quickly up and down her room, barefoot, two or three times, shaking the furniture till the vases and glasses sounded. Then at last she asked:

"Is it you, Alexander?"

"Yes, yes," he replied; "make haste and open the door."

As soon as she had done so she threw herself into his arms, exclaiming:

"Oh! What a fright! What a surprise! What a pleasure!"

He began to undress himself methodically, like he did everything, and from a chair he took his overcoat, which he was in the habit of hanging up in the hall. But suddenly he remained motionless, struck dumb with astonishment—there was a red ribbon in the buttonhole!

"Why," he stammered, "this—this—this overcoat has got the rosette in it!"

In a second his wife threw herself on him and, taking it from his hands, she said:

"No! You have made a mistake—give it to me."

But he still held it by one of the sleeves without letting it go, repeating in a half-dazed manner:

"Oh! Why? Just explain. Whose overcoat is it? It is not mine, as it has the Legion of Honor on it."

She tried to take it from him, terrified, and hardly able to say:

"Listen—listen—give it me. I must not tell you—it is a secret—listen to me."

But he grew angry and turned pale:

"I want to know how this overcoat comes to be here. It does not belong to me."

Then she almost screamed at him:

"Yes, it does; listen—swear to me—well—you are decorated."

She did not intend to joke at his expense.

He was so overcome that he let the overcoat fall and dropped into an armchair.

"I am—you say I am—decorated?"

"Yes, but it is a secret, a great secret."

She had put the glorious garment into a cupboard and came to her husband, pale and trembling.

"Yes," she continued, "it is a new overcoat that I have had made for you. But I swore that I would not tell you anything about it, as it will not be officially announced for a month or six weeks, and you were not to have known till your return from your business journey. Monsieur Rosselin managed it for you."

"Rosselin!" he contrived to utter in his joy. "He has obtained the decoration for me? He—— Oh!"

And he was obliged to drink a glass of water.

A little piece of white paper had fallen to the floor out of the pocket of the overcoat. Caillard picked it up; it was a visiting card, and he read out:

"Rosselin—deputy."

"You see how it is?" said his wife.

He almost cried with joy, and a week later it was announced in the *Journal Officiel* that M. Caillard had been awarded the Legion of Honor on account of his exceptional services.

A CRISIS

A BIG FIRE WAS BURNING, and the tea table was set for two. The Count de Sallure threw his hat, gloves and fur coat on a chair, while

the countess, who had removed her opera cloak, was smiling amiably at herself in the glass and arranging a few stray curls with her jeweled fingers. Her husband had been looking at her for the past few minutes, as if on the point of saying something, but hesitating; finally he said:

"You have flirted outrageously tonight!" She looked him straight in the eyes with an expression of triumph and defiance on her face.

"Why, certainly," she answered. She sat down, poured out the tea, and her husband took his seat opposite her.

"It made me look quite—ridiculous!"

"Is this a scene?" she asked, arching her brows. "Do you mean to criticize my conduct?"

"Oh no, I only meant to say that Monsieur Burel's attentions to you were positively improper, and if I had the right—I—would not tolerate it."

"Why, my dear boy, what has come over you? You must have changed your views since last year. You did not seem to mind who courted me and who did not a year ago. When I found out that you had a mistress, a mistress whom you loved passionately, I pointed out to you then, as you did me tonight (but I had good reasons), that you were compromising yourself and Madame de Servy, that your conduct grieved me and made me look ridiculous; what did you answer me? That I was perfectly free, that marriage between two intelligent people was simply a partnership, a sort of social bond, but not a moral bond. Is it not true? You gave me to understand that your mistress was far more captivating than I, that she was more womanly; that is what you said: 'more womanly.' Of course you said all this in a very nice way, and I acknowledge that you did your very best to spare my feelings, for which I am very grateful to you, I assure you, but I understand perfectly what you meant.

"We then decided to live practically separated; that is, under the same roof but apart from each other. We had a child, and it was necessary to keep up appearances before the world, but you intimated that if I chose to take a lover you would not object in the least, providing it was kept secret. You even made a long and very interesting discourse on the cleverness of women in such cases; how well they could manage such things, etc., etc. I understood perfectly, my dear boy. You loved Madame de Servy very much at that time, and my conjugal—legal—affection was an impediment to your happiness, but since then we have lived on the very best of terms. We go out in society together, it is true, but here in our own house we are complete strangers. Now for the past month or two you act as if you were jealous, and I do not understand it."

"I am not jealous, my dear, but you are so young, so impulsive, that I am afraid you will expose yourself to the world's criticisms."

"You make me laugh! Your conduct would not bear a very close scrutiny. You had better not preach what you do not practice."

"Do not laugh, I pray. This is no laughing matter. I am speaking as a friend, a true friend. As to your remarks, they are very much exaggerated."

"Not at all. When you confessed to me your infatuation for Madame de Servy, I took it for granted that you authorized me to imitate you. I have not done so."

"Allow me to——"

"Do not interrupt me. I have not done so. I have no lover—as yet. I am looking for one, but I have not found one to suit me. He must be very nice—nicer than you are—that is a compliment, but you do not seem to appreciate it."

"This joking is entirely uncalled for."

"I am not joking at all; I am in dead earnest. I have not forgotten a single word of what you said to me a year ago, and when it pleases me to do so, no matter what you may say or do, I shall take a lover. I shall do it without your even suspecting it—you will be none the wiser—like a great many others."

"How can you say such things?"

"How can I say such things? But, my dear boy, you were the first one to laugh when Madame de Gers joked about poor, unsuspecting Monsieur de Servy."

"That might be, but it is not becoming language for you."

"Indeed! You thought it a good joke when it concerned Monsieur de Servy, but you do not find it so appropriate when it concerns you. What a queer lot men are! However, I am not fond of talking about such things; I simply mentioned it to see if you were ready."

"Ready—for what?"

"Ready to be deceived. When a man gets angry on hearing such things he is not quite ready. I wager that in two months you will be the first one to laugh if I mention a deceived husband to you. It is generally the case when you are the deceived one."

"Upon my word, you are positively rude tonight; I have never seen you that way."

"Yes—I have changed—for the worse, but it is your fault."

"Come, my dear, let us talk seriously. I beg of you, I implore you not to let Monsieur Burel court you as he did tonight."

"You are jealous; I knew it."

"No, no, but I do not wish to be looked upon with ridicule, and if

I catch that man devouring you with his eyes like he did to-night—I—I will thrash him!"

"Could it be possible that you are in love with me?"

"Why not? I am sure I could do much worse."

"Thanks. I am sorry for you—because I do not love you any more."

The count got up, walked around the tea table and, going behind his wife, he kissed her quickly on the neck. She sprang up and with flashing eyes said: "How dare you do that? Remember, we are absolutely nothing to each other; we are complete strangers."

"Please do not get angry; I could not help it; you look so lovely tonight."

"Then I must have improved wonderfully."

"You look positively charming; your arms and shoulders are beautiful, and your skin——"

"Would captivate Monsieur Burel."

"How mean you are! But really, I do not recall ever having seen a woman as captivating as you are."

"You must have been fasting lately."

"What's that?"

"I say, you must have been fasting lately."

"Why—what do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say. You must have fasted for some time, and now you are famished. A hungry man will eat things which he will not eat at any other time. I am the neglected—dish, which you would not mind eating tonight."

"Marguerite! Whoever taught you to say those things?"

"You did. To my knowledge you have had four mistresses. Actresses, society women, gay women, etc., so how can I explain your sudden fancy for me, except by your long fast?"

"You will think me rude, brutal, but I have fallen in love with you for the second time. I love you madly!"

"Well, well! Then you—wish to——"

"Exactly."

"Tonight?"

"Oh, Marguerite!"

"There, you are scandalized again. My dear boy, let us talk quietly. We are strangers, are we not? I am your wife, it is true, but I am—free. I intended to engage my affection elsewhere, but I will give you the preference, providing—I receive the same compensation."

"I do not understand you; what do you mean?"

"I will speak more clearly. Am I as good looking as your mistresses?"

"A thousand times better."

"Better than the nicest one?"

"Yes, a thousand times."

"How much did she cost you in three months?"

"Really—what on earth do you mean?"

"I mean, how much did you spend on the costliest of your mistresses, in jewelry, carriages, suppers, etc., in three months?"

"How do I know?"

"You ought to know. Let us say, for instance, five thousand francs a month—is that about right?"

"Yes—about that."

"Well, my dear boy, give me five thousand francs and I will be yours for a month, beginning from tonight."

"Marguerite! Are you crazy?"

"No, I am not, but just as you say. Good night!"

The countess entered her boudoir. A vague perfume permeated the whole room. The count appeared in the doorway.

"How lovely it smells in here!"

"Do you think so? I always use *Peau d'Espagne*; I never use any other perfume."

"Really? I did not notice—it is lovely."

"Possibly, but be kind enough to go; I want to go to bed."

"Marguerite!"

"Will you please go?"

The count came in and sat on a chair.

Said the countess: "You will not go? Very well."

She slowly took off her waist, revealing her white arms and neck, then she lifted her arms above her head to loosen her hair.

The count took a step toward her.

The countess: "Do not come near me or I shall get real angry, do you hear?"

He caught her in his arms and tried to kiss her. She quickly took a tumbler of perfumed water standing on the toilet table and dashed it into his face.

He was terribly angry. He stepped back a few paces and murmured:

"How stupid of you!"

"Perhaps—but you know my conditions—five thousand francs!"

"Preposterous!"

"Why, pray?"

"Why? Because—whoever heard of a man paying his wife?"

"Oh! How horribly rude you are!"

"I suppose I am rude, but I repeat, the idea of paying one's wife is preposterous! Positively stupid!"

"Is it not much worse to pay a gay woman? It certainly would be stupid when you have a wife at home."

"That may be, but I do not wish to be ridiculous."

The countess sat down on the bed and took off her stockings, revealing her bare, pink feet.

The count approached a little nearer and said tenderly:

"What an odd idea of yours, Marguerite!"

"What idea?"

"To ask me for five thousand francs!"

"Odd? Why should it be odd? Are we not strangers? You say you are in love with me; all well and good. You cannot marry me, as I am already your wife, so you buy me. *Mon Dieu!* Have you not bought other women? Is it not much better to give me that money than to a strange woman who would squander it? Come, you will acknowledge that it is a novel idea to actually pay your own wife! An intelligent man like you ought to see how amusing it is; besides, a man never really loves anything unless it costs him a lot of money. It would add new zest to our—conjugal love, by comparing it with your—illegitimate love. Am I not right?"

She went toward the bell.

"Now then, sir, if you do not go I will ring for my maid!"

The count stood perplexed, displeased, and suddenly taking a handful of bank notes out of his pocket, he threw them at his wife, saying:

"Here are six thousand, you witch, but remember——"

The countess picked up the money, counted it and said:

"What?"

"You must not get used to it."

She burst out laughing and said to him:

"Five thousand francs each month, or else I shall send you back to your actresses, and if you are pleased with me—I shall ask for more."

A FRENCH ENOCH ARDEN

THE SEA LASHES the shore with its short and monstrous waves. Little white clouds are scudding quickly across the great blue sky, swept by a rapid wind, like birds, and the village, in the fold of the valley which runs down to the ocean, lies broiling in the sun.

Quite at the entrance is the house of the Martin-Levesques, alone, at the side of the road. It is a little fisherman's cottage with clay walls and a thatched roof adorned with blue iris flowers. A garden as big as a handkerchief, where sprout some onions, a few cabbages, some

parsley, some chervil, squares itself before the door. A hedge hems it in along the roadside.

The man has gone fishing, and the woman before the lodge is repairing the meshes of a big brown net hung on the wall like a great spider's web. A little girl of fourteen at the garden entrance, seated in a cane chair, leaning backward and resting her arm on the fence, is mending linen, the linen of the poor, already pieced and patched.

Another small girl, a year younger, is rocking in her arms a very little baby, yet without gestures or words, and the two youngsters of two or three years sitting on the ground are playing garden with their clumsy hands and throwing fistfuls of dust in each other's face.

No one speaks. Only the little rascal whom the girl is trying to put to sleep cries steadily with a sharp, weak little voice. A cat is sleeping at the window, and some blooming gillyflowers make, at the foot of the wall, a fine cushion of white blossoms, over which flies are buzzing.

The little girl who is sewing near the entrance calls suddenly:

"Mamma."

"What is the matter with you?" replied the mother.

"There he is again."

She had been uneasy since morning because there was a man prowling about the house, an old man who seemed to be poor. They had observed him as they were going with their father to the boat to see him embark. He was seated on the edge of the ditch opposite their gate, and when they came back they found him still there, looking at the house.

He seemed ill and very wretched. He had not stirred for more than an hour; then, seeing he would be considered a malefactor, he had risen and departed, dragging one leg.

But soon they had seen him return with his slow and weary step, and again he had sat down, a little farther away this time, as if to watch them.

The mother and daughters were afraid. The mother especially, because she was of a timorous nature and because her husband Levesque was not expected to come from the sea until nightfall.

Her husband's name was Levesque; hers was Martin, and they were called the Martin-Levesques. This is why: She had married for her first husband a man named Martin, who went to Newfoundland every summer fishing for cod.

After two years of married life she had a little girl by him, and another, three months after the craft which carried her husband, the Two Sisters, a three-masted bark from Dieppe, disappeared.

No news was ever received from it; none of its crew ever came back; it was considered to be a total wreck.

The Martin woman waited for her second husband ten years, bringing up her children with great difficulty; then as she was a good, strong woman, a fisherman of the neighborhood, Levesque, a widower with a boy, asked her in marriage. She married him and had two children by him in three years.

They lived painfully, laboriously. Bread was dear and meat almost unknown in the household. They ran in debt at times with the baker, in winter, during the stormy months. The little ones were well, nevertheless. People said:

"They are brave folk, the Martin-Levesques. The wife is a hard worker, and Levesque has not his equal for fishing."

The little girl seated at the gate repeated: "You would think that he knew us. Perhaps it is some poor man from Epreville or from Auzebogo."

But the mother was not deceived. No, no, it wasn't anyone of the country, surely!

As he moved no more than a stake, and as he kept his eyes glued to the Martin-Levesques' cottage, the woman became furious and, fear making her brave, she seized a shovel and went out of the door.

"What are you doing there?" she called to the vagabond.

He answered in a gruff voice:

"I am taking the fresh air! Does that do you any harm?"

She replied:

"Why are you spying like this on my house?"

The man replied:

"I am not injuring anybody. Isn't it permitted to sit down by the roadside?"

Not finding an answer ready, she went back into the house.

The day passed slowly. Toward noon the man disappeared, but he came by again toward five o'clock. They did not see any more of him during the evening.

Levesque returned at dusk. They told him about it. He remarked:

"It is some skulker or good-for-nothing."

He went to bed, undisturbed, while his wife dreamed of this prowler who had looked at her so strangely.

When day came there was a great wind, and the sailor, seeing that he could not start out to sea, helped his wife at mending nets.

About nine o'clock the eldest daughter, a Martin, who had gone out to get some bread, came back running with a frightened air and cried:

"Ma, there he is again!"

The mother was startled and, very pale, said to her husband:

"Go and speak to him, Levesque, so that he won't watch us like this, because it worries me to death."

And Levesque, a big sailor with a complexion like a brick, a thickened beard, blue eyes, strong neck, always wearing woolen garments on account of the wind and rain at sea, walked out quietly and approached the straggler.

And they began to talk.

The mother and the children looked on from the distance, anxious and trembling.

Suddenly the unknown rose and came toward the house with Levesque.

The wife, terrified, drew back.

Her husband said to her:

"Give him a piece of bread and a glass of cider. He hasn't eaten anything since the day before yesterday."

They both entered the house, followed by the woman and the children. The vagabond sat down and began to eat, with his head lowered beneath the glances.

The mother, standing up, scrutinized him. The two big girls, the Martins, leaning against the door, one of them holding the latest baby, fixed their eager eyes upon him, and the two boys, seated in the ashes of the fireplace, had stopped playing with the black kettle to look at this stranger too.

Levesque, having taken a chair, asked him:

"Do you come from a distance?"

"I have come from Cette."

"On foot as far as that?"

"Yes, on foot. A man has to walk when he cannot afford to ride."

"And where are you going?"

"I was coming here."

"You know someone here?"

"That might be."

They were silent. He ate slowly, although he was famished, and he took a sip of cider after each mouthful of bread. He had a worn, wrinkled face and seemed to have suffered much.

Levesque brusquely asked him:

"What is your name?"

"My name is Martin."

A strange shudder shook the mother. She took a step forward, as if to scan the vagabond more closely, and stood opposite him with her arms hanging down and her mouth open. Nobody said anything further. Levesque finally resumed:

"Are you from here?"

He answered: "I am from here." And as he raised his head the

woman's eyes and his met and remained fixed upon each other, as if their glances were fastened.

She suddenly said in a changed voice, low and trembling:

"Is it you, my husband?"

He slowly replied:

"Yes, it is I."

He did not move, continuing to masticate the bread.

Levesque, more surprised than moved, stammered:

"It is you, Martin?"

The other man said simply:

"Yes, it is I."

And the second husband asked:

"Where have you come from?"

He first told his story.

"From the coast to Africa; I was wrecked on a reef. Three of us were saved, Picard, Vatinel and me. And then we were captured by savages who held us twelve years. Picard and Vatinel are dead. An English traveler passing that way took me and brought me to Cette, and here I am."

The woman began to weep, her face in her apron.

Levesque said:

"What shall we do now?"

Martin asked:

"You are her husband?"

Levesque replied:

"Yes, I am."

They looked at each other and were silent.

Then Martin, gazing at the children in a circle around him, nodded toward two little girls.

"Those are mine."

Levesque said:

"They are yours."

He did not rise; he did not kiss them; he merely remarked:

"Good God! How tall they are."

Levesque repeated:

"What shall we do?"

Martin, perplexed, could not tell. Finally he decided:

"I will do as you wish. I don't want to injure you. It is vexing all the same, considering the house. I have two children; you have three, each his own. But the mother, is she yours or mine? I will consent to whatever you wish, but the house is mine, since my father left it to me, since I was born here and since there are papers for it at the notary's."

The woman still wept with little sobs stifled in the blue cloth of her apron. The two tall girls drew near and looked at their father with uneasiness.

He had finished eating. But Levesque had an idea:

"We must go to the priest; he will decide."

Martin rose, and as he approached his wife she threw herself sobbing upon his breast.

"My husband! You are here! Martin, my poor Martin, you are here!"

And she held him in her arms, suddenly pierced by a breath of olden times, by a great shock of memories which recalled to her the days when she was twenty and their first embraces.

Martin, himself moved, kissed her on the cap. The two children in the corner began to howl together, seeing their mother weep, and the last born, in the arms of the second Martin girl, shrieked with the sharp sound of a cracked fife.

Levesque, standing up, waited.

"Come," he said, "we must get this straightened out."

Martin released his wife, and as he looked at his two daughters their mother said to them:

"Kiss your father, at least."

They approached him together, astonished and a little afraid. And he kissed them one after the other on both cheeks with a big peasant's smack. And seeing this unknown approach, the little child uttered such piercing cries that it almost went into convulsions.

Then the two men went out together.

As they passed the Café du Commerce Levesque asked:

"Shall we have a little drop?"

"I would like it very much," said Martin.

They entered and sat down in a room which was vacant.

"Ho! Chicot, two bottles of wine, good wine. This is Martin who has come back, Martin of the Two Sisters, which was lost."

And the tavern keeper, three glasses in one hand and a carafe in the other, approached, large of paunch, ruddy, fat, and asked with a quiet air:

"What? You here, Martin?"

Martin replied: "I am here."

JULIE ROMAIN

IN THE SPRINGTIME two years ago I was walking along the shores of the Mediterranean. What is more charming than to dream while walking over a lonely road? One enjoys the sunlight and the caressing wind when climbing the mountains or strolling by the seashore. And in his daydreams what illusions, what love poems, what adventures pass in two hours through the mind of one who idles along a road. Every possible hope, confused and joyous, penetrates him with the warm, light air; he inhales them with the breeze, and they give birth in his being to an appetite for happiness that increases like the hunger he acquires in walking. Sweet and fleeting thoughts sing in his soul as he comes closer to nature.

I followed the road that leads from Saint-Raphaël to Italy, or rather, I made my way through that superb and changing scenery which seems made to be celebrated in all the love poems of the earth. It seemed to me a pity to think that from Cannes to Monaco scarcely anyone comes into this part of country save to make trouble, to juggle with money or to display under this delicious sky and in this garden of roses and oranges base vanities, stupid pretensions and vile covetousness and to show the human mind as it is—servile, ignorant, arrogant and grasping.

Suddenly in one of the curves of the ravishing bays I saw a group of villas, four or five only, fronting on the sea at the foot of the mountain. Behind them was a wild forest of pines which covered two great valleys apparently without roads or outlet. Involuntarily I stopped in front of the gate of one of these chalets, so pretty was it, a little white cottage with brown decorations, covered with roses that climbed to the roof. The garden was filled with flowers of all colors and every size, coquettishly arranged in studied disorder. The lawn was dotted with flower beds; a vase with trailing vines stood on the step of the veranda, and over the windows hung clusters of purple grapes, while the stone balustrade that surrounded this charming dwelling was covered with enormous red morning-glories that looked like spots of blood. Behind the house stretched a long alley of orange trees in flower, which reached as far as the foot of the mountain.

On the door of the villa in small, gilt letters I read this name: "Villa d'Antan." I asked myself what poet or fairy inhabited the place, what inspired recluse had discovered it and created this dream of a dwelling that appeared to spring from masses of flowers.

A workman was breaking stones on the road at a short distance. I asked him the name of the proprietor of the chalet. He replied that it belonged to the famous Mme Julie Romain.

Julie Romain! In my childhood I had often heard her spoken of, the great actress, the rival of Rachel! No woman had been more applauded or more loved—more loved, above all! How many duels had been fought and how many suicides had been committed because of her, and how many wild adventures had been undertaken for her sake! What was her age now, that seductress? Sixty—no, seventy—seventy-five years. Julie Romain! Here, in this house! I recalled again the emotion created throughout France (I was twelve years old then) by her flight to Sicily with one lover, a poet, after her notorious quarrel with another adorer.

She fled with her new love one evening after a first-night representation during which the audience had applauded her for half an hour and called her out eleven times in succession. She went away with the poet in a post chaise, as was the custom then; they had crossed the sea in order to love in that antique island, daughter of Greece, under the immense grove of orange trees that surrounds Palermo, which is called the "Conque d'Ov."

Their ascent of Etna was gossiped about, and also how they hung over the immense crater, arm in arm, cheek against cheek, as if they desired to throw themselves into the gulf of fire.

He was dead now, the writer of affecting verses, of poems so brilliant that they dazzled a whole generation, and so subtle and mysterious that they opened a new world to other poets.

The other lover was dead also, the abandoned one, who created for her those musical expressions that remain in all hearts, expressions of triumph and despair that are at once intoxicating and heart-rending.

She lived here, in this house veiled with flowers.

I hesitated no longer. I rang the bell. A domestic came to open the door, a boy of eighteen years, awkward and shy, with hands that appeared to be in his way. I wrote on my card a gallant compliment to the old actress and an ardent prayer that she would receive me. Perhaps she might know my name and allow me to see her.

The young valet disappeared but soon returned and asked me to follow him. He showed me into a neat drawing room, correct in every detail in the style of Louis Philippe, with furniture of a cold and cumbersome fashion, the coverings of which were being removed in my honor by a little maid of about sixteen years, with a slender figure but not much beauty.

Then the servants left me alone. I looked around the room with interest. On the walls hung three portraits, one was of the actress in a

celebrated role, another was of the poet-lover wearing a long frock coat, tight at the waist, and the ruffled shirt of those days, and the third was of the musician, seated before a clavichord. The lady was blonde and charming in her portrait, but her pose was a little affected, as was the fashion of that day. Her charming mouth and blue eyes smiled graciously, and the technique of the painting was of a high degree of excellence. Those three remarkable faces seemed to be looking already at the next generation, and their surroundings had an air of a day that was past and of individualities that were no more.

A door opened, and a little woman entered. She was very old, very small, with eyebrows and bands of white hair. Somehow she reminded me of a white mouse, quick and furtive in her movements. She gave me her hand and, with a voice that was still fresh, vibrating and sonorous, she said graciously: "Thank you, monsieur. It is very kind of the men of today to remember the women of yesterday! Be seated!"

I told her that her house had attracted me, that I had tried to learn the name of the proprietor and, having learned it, I could not resist the desire to ring her bell.

"Your visit gives me the greater pleasure, monsieur," she said, "as it is the first time such an event has happened. When your card was handed to me with the gracious compliment it carried, I was as startled as if someone had announced an old friend who had been gone these twenty years. I am forgotten, truly forgotten; no one remembers me; no one will think of me until the day of my death; then all the papers will talk for three days of Julie Romain, telling anecdotes, giving details and souvenirs and scandals and, perhaps, pompous eulogies. Then that will be the end of me!"

She was silent a moment and then resumed: "And that will not be long now. In a few months, in a few days, perhaps, the little woman who is now alive will be nothing but a corpse!"

She raised her eyes to her portrait, which met her gaze as if smiling at that withered caricature of itself; then she looked at the two men, the scornful poet and the inspired musician, both of whom seemed to say: "What does that ruin ask of us?"

An indescribable, keen, irresistible sadness seized my heart, the sadness that overwhelms those whose lives are finished and who struggle still with memories, as a drowning man struggles in deep water.

From the place where I sat I could see brilliant and swiftly moving carriages passing along the road, going from Nice to Monte Carlo. And seated inside were beautiful young women, rich and happy, and men, smiling and satisfied. She followed my glance and, comprehend-

ing my thought, murmured with a resigned smile: "It is not possible to be and to have been at the same time."

"How beautiful life must have been for you!" I said.

She sighed deeply. "Yes, beautiful and sweet! It is for that reason that I regret it so much."

I saw that she was disposed to talk of herself, so softly and with delicate precautions, as one would touch a painful wound, I began to question her. She spoke of her success, of her intoxicating joys, of her friends, of her whole triumphant existence.

"Your greatest joy and your deepest happiness—did you owe them to the theater, madame?" I asked.

"Oh no!" she replied quickly.

I smiled and she added, raising her eyes with a sad look to the portraits of the two men:

"I owed my greatest happiness to them."

I could not refrain from asking her to which one she owed it.

"To both, monsieur! I even confuse them in my mind sometimes, and besides, I feel remorse toward one of them to this day."

"Then, madame, it is not to them but to the act of love itself that you owe your gratitude. They have merely been love's instruments."

"That is possible. But, ah, what wonderful instruments!"

"Are you certain that you have not been loved—that you would not have been loved as well, and perhaps better, by a simple man, one who was not great but who would have offered you his whole life, his whole heart, his whole being, every thought and every hour? With those two you had two formidable rivals—music and poetry."

She cried out with force, with that youthful voice which could still thrill the soul: "No, monsieur, no! A simpler man might have loved me better, perhaps, but he would not have loved me as those two did. Ah! But they knew how to sing the music of love as no other man in the world could have sung it.

"How they intoxicated me! Is it possible that any other man could have found that which they found in words and in sounds? Is it enough to love if one does not know how to put into love all the poetry and all the music of the sky and the earth? They knew, those two, how to make a woman ecstatic with joy, and with their songs and their words as well as with their deeds. Yes, there was perhaps more of illusion than reality in our passion, but those illusions lift you to the clouds, whereas realities alone always leave you on the earth. If others loved me more it was through them alone that I learned, felt and adored love!"

Suddenly she began to weep noiselessly tears of bitter sorrow. I appeared not to notice it and looked far away out of the window. After a few moments she went on:

"You see, monsieur, with most people the heart grows old with the body. With me that has not happened. My poor body is seventy-five years old, but my heart is only twenty. And that is the reason why I live all alone, with my flowers and my dreams."

Again a long silence fell between us. After a time she calmed herself and again spoke smilingly:

"How you would laugh at me, monsieur, if you knew how I pass my evenings when the weather is fine! I am ashamed of my folly and pity myself at the same time."

It was useless for me to beg her to tell me; she would not do so; then I rose to go, at which she cried, "What! so soon?"

I told her that I had intended to dine at Monte Carlo, and at once she asked a little timidly: "Would you not like to dine with me? It would give me very much pleasure."

I accepted her invitation immediately. She appeared delighted and rang the bell; then when she had given a few orders to the little maid, she said she would like to show me her house.

A kind of glass-covered veranda, full of plants, opened from the dining room and permitted one to see, from one end to the other, the long alley of orange trees, extending to the foot of the mountains. A low seat, hidden under the shrubbery, indicated that the aged actress often came to sit there.

Then we went into the garden to look at the flowers. Evening came on softly, one of those calm, warm evenings that brings forth all the perfumes of the earth. It was almost dark when we placed ourselves at the table. The dinner was excellent, and we sat long over it. We became quite intimate friends. A profound sympathy for her had sprung up in my heart. She drank a glass of wine and became more friendly and confidential.

"Let us go out and look at the moon," she said at last. "I adore the moon, the lovely moon! It has been the witness of my greatest joys. It seems to me that all my sweetest memories are treasured there and that I have only to look at it in order to have them come back to me. And sometimes, in the evening, I arrange for myself a pretty scene, so pretty—if you only knew! But no, you would laugh at me too much. I cannot tell you—I don't dare—no—no, I cannot tell you."

"Ah, madame, continue, I pray!" I begged of her. "What is your little secret? Tell me! I promise you not to laugh—I swear it!"

She hesitated; I took her hands, her poor little hands, so thin and cold, and kissed them one after the other many times, as her lovers were wont to do in former days. She was moved, though she still hesitated.

"You promise me not to laugh?" she said timidly.

"Yes, I swear it, madame!"

"Well then, come!" she said with a smile.

We rose from the table, and as the awkward youth in green livery drew back the chair behind her she spoke a few low, quick words in his ear.

He replied respectfully, "Yes, madame, immediately."

She took my arm and led me upon the veranda. The orange tree walk was a beautiful sight. The moon cast a slender line of silver among the trees, a long line of light that fell on the yellow sand between the dense and rounded branches. As the trees were in bloom, their delicious and penetrating perfume filled the air, and among the dark foliage were thousands of fireflies whose tiny flames looked like the seed of stars.

"Oh, what an ideal environment for a scene of love!" I cried.

She smiled. "Is it not? Is it not? You will see presently!"

She made me sit down beside her and murmured:

"The memory of such scenes is what makes me regret life. But you hardly dream of those things, you men of today. You are merely money-makers, businessmen. You don't know how to talk to us even. When I say 'us,' I mean women who are young. Love affairs have become merely liaisons, which originate often in an unacknowledged bill of the dressmaker. If you find the bill more important than the woman, you disappear, but if you esteem the woman of greater value than the bill, you pay! Nice manners, and charming affections!"

She took my hand. "Look!" she said.

I was astonished and transported with pleasure at the charming picture that appeared. Below us, at the end of the alley and in the full moonlight, a youth and a maiden were coming toward us, clasping each other around the waist. They advanced, their arms entwined, walking slowly in the moon's rays, the soft effulgence of which bathed them completely.

They disappeared in the darkness for a moment, then reappeared farther down the avenue.

The youth was dressed in a white satin costume of the last century, with a broad hat over which hung an ostrich feather. The maiden wore a skirt with wide hoops, and her head was dressed with the high, powdered coiffure affected by beautiful dames in the days of the Regency.

At last they came to a halt about a hundred steps away from us and, standing in the middle of the alley, they embraced after saluting each other gracefully.

Suddenly I recognized the two little servants! Then I was seized

with one of those irresistible desires to laugh that shake one all over. I did not laugh, however. I resisted the impulse and waited to see the next scene in this extraordinary comedy.

The lovers now returned toward the end of the valley, and distance again made them appear charming. They withdrew farther and farther away and at last disappeared like figures in a dream. The alley seemed lonely without them.

I took my departure also. I left immediately so that I should not see them again, for I thought it probable that the spectacle was made to last a long time, in order to recall all the past—that past of love and scenic effect, that fictitious past, deceiving and seductive, falsely yet truly charming—to cause the tender heart to throb again in the romantic breast of the old actress and to use me as a final instrument.

AN UNREASONABLE WOMAN

A GREAT WIND was whistling outside, an autumn wind, groaning and galloping; one of those winds which kill the last leaves and carry them away to the clouds.

The hunters had finished their dinner and were still booted, red, animated and lighted up. They were those demi-Norman lords, half country squire, half peasant, rich and vigorous, shaped for cutting the horns of beeves when they stopped them in the market.

They had hunted all day on M. Blondel's estate, M. Blondel, the mayor of Eparville, and they were eating now around the great table in a kind of farm-villa of which their host was the proprietor.

They were talking like a whirlwind, laughing like a roar of wild animals and drinking like cisterns, their legs stretched out, their elbows on the cloth, their eyes shining under the flame of the lamps, heated by a hearth fire so formidable as to send to the ceiling its ruddy glow. They chatted of hunting and dogs. But they had come to the hour when other ideas come to men half tipsy, and all eyes followed the strong girl with plump cheeks who carried at the end of her red wrists great platters filled with food.

Suddenly a devil of a fellow, who had become a veterinary after having studied for a priest and who looked after all the animals of the district, by name Sejour, said:

"My eyes! Monsieur Blondel, you have a girl there who is not starved."

And a laugh made the echoes ring. Then an old nobleman, declassed, ruined by alcohol, M. de Varnetot, raised his voice.

"I once had a droll adventure with a girl like that. Wait, I must tell it to you. Every time I think of her it recalls Mirza, my dog which I sold to Count d'Haussonel and which returned every day when she was let out, because she was unable to leave me. Finally I got angry and begged the count to keep her chained. Do you know what the beast did? She died of grief.

"But to return to my maid; here is the story:

"I was then twenty-five years old and lived as a bachelor in my castle at Villebon. You know that when one is young and has an income and makes a beast of himself every evening he has his eye on all sides.

"I discovered a young girl who was in service at the house of Deboultot of Cauville. You know Deboultot well, you, Blondel. To be brief, she pleased me so much, the hussy, that I went one day to her master and made a business proposition to him. He gave me his servant, and I sold him my black mare Cocotte, which he had sought of me for two years. He extended his hand to me and said: 'It is agreed M. de Varnetot.' It was a bargain. The little one came to the castle, and I took my black mare to Cauville myself, and I let him have her for three hundred crowns.

"At first everything went as if on wheels. No one mistrusted anything. Only Rose loved me a little too much for my taste. The child, you see, was not a nobody. She had something out of the common in her veins. She came from some girl who committed some error with her master.

"Briefly, she adored me. There were cajolings, endearments, little pet names and heaps of caresses—enough to make it a matter of reflection.

"I said to myself: 'This cannot last, or I would allow myself to be caught.' But they do not catch me easily. I am not one of those to be taken in with a couple of kisses. So I had my eyes opened when she announced to me that she was large.

"Pif! Pif! It was as if someone had put two shots from a gun into my breast. And she embraced me; she embraced me, I say, and laughed and danced as if she were mad. What? I said nothing the first day, but at night I reasoned with myself; I thought: 'It is just here; it is necessary to parry the blow and cut the thread; it is the only time.' You understand, I had my father and mother at Barneville, and my sister married to the Marquis d'Yspare, at Rollebec, two leagues from Villebon. There must not be any stories.

"But how was I to draw myself out of the affair? If she left the house

something would be suspected, and people would talk. If I kept her there the condition would soon be recognized, and then I could not turn her away.

"I spoke to my uncle about it, the Baron de Creteil, an old buck who has known more than one such case, and asked his advice. He responded tranquilly:

"You must marry, my boy."

"I made a leap. 'Marry, Uncle?' I said. 'Marry whom?'

"He shrugged his shoulders gently as he replied:

"Whom you wish; that is your affair, not mine. If one is not stupid there is always somebody to be found."

"I reflected for two weeks upon this idea and ended by saying to myself: 'My uncle is right.'

"Then I commenced to rack my brain to think of someone, when one evening the justice of the peace, with whom I was dining, said to me:

"Mother Paumelle's son is into mischief again; it is true that a good dog shows his race."

"This Mother Paumelle was a sly old gypsy of whom the youth could have all they desired. For six francs she would certainly have sold her soul, and her rake of a son followed in her footsteps.

"I went and found her and very gently made her understand the state of my affairs. As I was somewhat embarrassed in my explanations, she demanded all at once:

"Well, how much will you give to this little one?"

"She was malicious, this old woman, but as I was not stupid, I was prepared for business. I owned three pieces of wasteland beyond Sasseville which belong to my three farms in Villebon. The farmers were always complaining that it was too far away; in short, I took back the three fields, six acres in all, and as my farmers found fault, I returned to them, up to the end of each lease, all their rents in poultry. In this way the thing was settled. Then, having bought a piece on one side from my neighbor, Monsieur Aumonte, I had a little house constructed down there, the whole thing for about fifteen hundred francs in all. In this way I had got together a little farm, which had not cost me very much, that I could give to the little girl for a marriage portion.

"The old woman cried out: 'It is not enough, but I will wait; we will leave it without deciding anything.'

"The next day at daybreak the lad came to find me. I could scarcely recall his face, but when I saw him I was reassured; he was not bad for a peasant but had the air of a rude fellow.

"He looked at the affair from a distance, as if he were buying a cow. When we had agreed he wished to see the property, and we set out

together over the fields. The scamp kept me going for three hours over the land; he surveyed it, measured it, took up the earth and crumbled it in his hands, as if he were afraid of being deceived in the merchandise. The house was not yet roofed; he exacted slate instead of thatch, because it needed less repairs! Then he said to me:

"'And the furniture; you must give that.'

"I protested: 'No. It is enough to give you a farm.'

"He sneered: 'Yes, a farm and a child.'

"I colored in spite of myself. He went on:

"'Come, now, you must give a bed, a table, the chest of drawers, three chairs and the kitchen dishes, or nothing can be done.'

"I consented to it.

"Then we started to return. He had not yet said a word about the girl. But suddenly, with a sly, constrained air, he asked:

"'But if she should die who would it go to, this farm?'

"I answered: 'To you, naturally.'

"That was what he had wanted to know since morning. Immediately he extended his hand to me with a satisfied appearance. We were of one accord.

"Oh! But I had difficulty in making Rose consent. She dragged herself at my feet, sobbed and kept repeating: 'It was you proposed it to me! It was you! It was you!' For more than a week she resisted in spite of my reasoning and my prayers. They are stupid, these women! As soon as they get love into their heads they understand nothing else. Wisdom is nothing; it is love above all and all for love!

"Finally I got angry and threatened to throw her out. Then she yielded, little by little, on the condition that I would allow her to come and see me from time to time.

"I myself conducted her to the altar, paid for the ceremony and gave the wedding dinner. I did the thing up grandly, in short. Then, 'Good-by, my children!' I went to pass six months with my brother in Touraine.

"When I returned I learned that she had been at the house every week asking for me. And I had scarcely been home an hour before I saw her coming with a baby in her arms. Believe me if you will, but it affected me in some way to see this little monkey. I believe I even embraced it.

"As for the mother, she was a wreck, a skeleton, a shadow. She looked thin and old. Ye gods! It was evident this marriage was not to her liking. I said to her mechanically:

"'Are you happy?'

"Then she began to weep like a fountain and with hiccups and sobs she cried:

"I can never, never leave you now. I would rather die; I cannot."

"She made a devil of a noise. I consoled her as well as I could and conducted her back to the gate.

"I learned that her husband beat her and that her mother-in-law made life hard for her, the old cabbagehead.

"Two days later she returned. She took me in her arms and dragged herself upon the earth. 'Kill me,' she said, 'but I will never go back down there.'

"This is exactly what Mirza would have said could she have spoken! These stories began to be very tiresome to me, and I went away again for another six months.

"When I returned—when I returned I learned that she had died three weeks before, having visited the castle every Sunday—just like Mirza. The child had also died eight days before.

"As for the husband, the cunning rascal, he inherited the property. He has turned out well since, it appears, and is now municipal counselor."

M. de Varnetot added, laughing:

"It is a fact that I made the fortune of that man!"

And M. Sejour, the veterinary, concluded gravely, carrying a glass of brandy to his lips:

"Say what you will, but with women like that, such things should not be."

ROSALIE PRUDENT

THERE WAS A MYSTERY in that affair about Rosalie Prudent, which neither the jury, nor the judge, nor the prosecuting attorney of the Republic himself could understand.

The girl Rosalie was a servant at the house of the Varainbot family, of Mantes. She became *enceinte* and, unknown to her employers, had given birth to a child in the garret during the night and had then killed the child and buried it in the garden.

It was the ordinary story of most of the infanticides committed by servants. But one act remained inexplicable. The examination of the girl's room had resulted in the discovery of a complete layette for an infant, made by Rosalie herself, who had passed her nights during three months in cutting out the garments and sewing them. The grocer where she had bought her candles (paid for out of her wages), in order to perform this long task, came forward and testified to the fact of their pur-

chase. In addition it was learned that the midwife of the town, informed by Rosalie of her condition, had given her all the advice and information in case the child should be born at a time when aid was impossible to obtain. She had found a place, also, at Poissy for Rosalie Prudent, who foresaw her loss of situation, as the Varambots were severe on the subject of morality.

They appeared in Court, the man and his wife, small provincials of moderate means, exasperated against the vulgar creature who had besmirched the immaculateness of their house. They would have liked to have seen her guillotined at once without trial, and they overwhelmed her with insults, which in their mouths became accusations.

The guilty one, a tall, handsome girl of lower Normandy, fairly well educated for her station, wept without ceasing and made no reply to them or to anyone. The court came to the conclusion that she had accomplished that act of barbarity in a moment of despair and insanity, since everything indicated that she had hoped to keep her infant and bring it up.

The judge tried once more to make her speak, to get her to acknowledge her crime and, having asked her with great kindness to do so, he made her understand at last that the jury sitting there to judge her did not wish her death but were ready to pity her.

The girl appeared to be making up her mind to speak at last.

"Tell us now at first who is the father of that child," said the judge.

Until that moment she had refused obstinately to divulge this fact. now she replied suddenly, looking straight at her employers, who had come there in a rage to calumniate her.

"It is Monsieur Joseph, the nephew of Monsieur Varambot!"

Varambot and his wife started, and both cried at the same time:

"It is false! She lies! It is infamous!"

The judge bade them be silent and said:

"Continue, I beg of you, and tell us how it happened."

Then the girl began to speak hurriedly, seeming to find some comfort for her poor, solitary, bruised heart in giving vent to her sorrow before these severe-looking men, whom she had taken until then for enemies and inflexible judges.

"Yes, it was Monsieur Joseph Varambot—it happened when he came for his vacation last summer."

"What is the occupation of this Monsieur Joseph Varambot?"

"He is underofficer in the artillery, monsieur. He was two months at the house—two months of the summer. I wasn't thinking of anything when he began to look at me and then to say things to me and finally to make love to me the whole day long. I was easy, monsieur! He told me I was a handsome girl, that I pleased him, that I was to his taste.

For myself, he pleased me, to be sure. What would you have done? Anyone listens to those things when one is alone—as I am. I am alone on the earth, monsieur. There is no one to whom I can talk—no one to whom I can tell my troubles. I have neither father, nor mother, nor brother nor sister—no one! He seemed like a brother who had come to me when he began to talk to me. And then he asked me to go down to the river one evening so that we might talk without making so much noise. And I went down there. Could I have known what would happen? He put his arms around my waist—of course I didn't want to—no, no! I couldn't help it. I wanted to cry; the air was so soft and warm—it was clear moonlight—I couldn't help it! No, I swear to you, I couldn't help it—he did what he pleased. That lasted three weeks, as long as he remained. I would have followed him to the end of the world. But he went away, and I didn't know that I was *enceinte*—I didn't! I didn't know it until the month afterward.”

She began to weep so violently that they were obliged to give her time to compose herself. Then the judge spoke in the tone of a father confessor: “Go on, my girl, go on.”

She continued: “When I knew that I was *enceinte* I told Madame Boudin, the midwife, to whom one can tell these things, and I asked her what to do in case that happened without her. And then I made the clothes, night after night, until one o'clock in the morning; and then I looked for another place, for I knew very well I should be discharged, but I wished to remain in that house until the end, in order to economize the pennies, seeing that I had no money and that I would need it for the little one.”

“Then you did not wish to kill him?”

“Oh! Surely not, monsieur.”

“Why did you kill him then?”

“Here's how it happened. It came sooner than I thought it would. It took me in the kitchen as I was washing my dishes. Monsieur and Madame Varambot had retired already, so I went upstairs without trouble, holding to the banisters. I lay down on the floor in my room, so as not to soil the bed. That lasted perhaps one hour—but it may have been two or three—I can't tell, so much pain did I have—and then—and then it was over, and I took up my baby!

“Oh yes! I was happy, for sure! I did everything that Madame Boudin told me, everything! Then I laid him on the bed, and then another pain began, and it was a pain to kill anyone. If you knew what that was, you others, you wouldn't do as much I'm sure! I fell on my knees, and then on my back on the floor, and then it began all over again, and that, too, lasted one hour, or perhaps two, and there I was all alone.

Finally there came another little one, yes, another, two of them, like that! I took it up as I took the first one, and I put it on the bed by the side of the other. One—two! Can it be possible, I said? Two babies! And I, who earn twenty francs a month! Say—was it possible for me to take care of them? To care for one—yes, I might do that by depriving myself, but not two!

"The thought of that turned my head. What do I know about it, I? Could I choose, say? Do I know? I saw myself come to my last day! I couldn't keep two, so I put the pillow on them without knowing what I was doing, and I threw myself on the bed and upon them too. And I stayed there, rolling and crying, until daylight, which I saw through the window. I looked at them—they were both dead under the pillow, quite dead. Then I took them under my arm. I went down the stairs and out in the garden; I took the gardner's spade and I buried them in the ground, as deep as I could, one here and the other there, not together, so that they could not talk of their mother, if they do talk, the little dead children. Do I know?

"And then I went back to my bed, and I was so sick that I could not get up. They made the doctor come, and he understood everything. That is the truth, Monsieur the Judge. Do what you want to me. I am ready."

During her speech half of the jurymen had been wiping their eyes over and over again, trying to hide their emotion. All the women in the courtroom were sobbing.

"At what spot in the garden did you bury the other infant?" asked the judge.

"Which one did you find?" Rosalie inquired.

"The one that was under the artichokes."

"Ah! The other is buried under the strawberries beside the well!" The poor girl began again to sob so loud that it was enough to break one's heart to hear her. The jury acquitted her.

HIPPOLYTE'S CLAIM

THE FAT JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, with one eye closed and the other half open, is listening with evident displeasure to the plaintiffs. Once in a while he gives a sort of grunt that foretells his opinion, and in a thin voice resembling that of a child, he interrupts them to ask questions. He has just rendered judgement in the case of M. Joly against

M. Petitpas, the contestants having come to court on account of the boundary of a field which had been accidentally overstepped by M. Petitpas's farm hand, while the latter was plowing.

Now he calls the case of Hippolyte Lacour, vestryman and ironmonger, against Mme Céleste Césarine Luneau, widow of Anthime Isidore Luneau.

Hippolyte Lacour is forty-five years old; he is tall and gaunt, with a clean-shaven face and long hair, and he speaks in a slow, singsong voice.

Mme Luneau appears to be about forty years of age. She is built like a prize fighter, and her plain dress is stretched tightly over her portly form. Her enormous hips hold up her overflowing bosom in front, while in the back they support the great rolls of flesh that cover her shoulders. Her face, with strongly cut features, rests on a short, fat neck, and her strong voice is pitched at a key that makes the windows and the eardrums of her auditors vibrate. She is about to become a mother, and her huge form protrudes like a mountain.

The witnesses for the defense are waiting to be called.

His Honor begins: Hippolyte Lacour, state your complaint.

The plaintiff speaks: Your honor, it will be nine months on Saint Michael's Day that the defendant came to me one evening, after I had rung the Angelus, and began an explanation relating to her barrenness.

THE JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: Kindly be more explicit.

HIPPOLYTE: Very well, your honor. Well, she wanted to have a child and desired my participation. I didn't raise any objection, and she promised to give me one hundred francs. The thing was all cut and dried, and now she refuses to acknowledge my claim, which I renew before your honor.

THE JUSTICE: I don't understand in the least. You say that she wanted a child? What kind of a child? Did she wish to adopt one?

HIPPOLYTE: No, your honor, she wanted a new one.

THE JUSTICE: What do you mean by a new one?

HIPPOLYTE: I mean a newborn child, one that we were to beget as if we were man and wife.

THE JUSTICE: You astonish me. To what end did she make this abnormal proposition?

HIPPOLYTE: Your honor, at first I could not make out her reasons and was taken a little aback. But as I don't do anything without thoroughly investigating beforehand, I called on her to explain matters to me, which she did. You see, her husband, Anthime Isidore, whom you knew as well as you know me, had died the week before, and his money reverted to his family. This greatly displeased her on account of the loss it meant. so she went to a lawyer who told her all about what

might happen if a child should be born to her after ten months. I mean by this that if she gave birth to a child inside of the ten months following the death of Anthime Isidore, her offspring would be considered legitimate and would entitle her to the inheritance. She made up her mind at once to run the risk and came to me after church, as I have already had the honor of telling you, seeing that I am the father of eight living children, the eldest of whom is a grocer in Caen, department of Calvados, and legitimately married to Victoire-Elisabeth Rabou——

THE JUSTICE: These details are superfluous. Go back to the subject.

HIPPOLYTE: I am getting there, your honor. So she said to me: "If you succeed I'll give you one hundred francs as soon as I get the doctor's report." Well, your honor, I made ready to give entire satisfaction, and after eight weeks or so I learned with pleasure that I had succeeded. But when I asked her for the hundred francs she refused to pay me. I renewed my demands several times, never getting so much as a pin. She even called me a liar and a weakling, a libel which can be destroyed by glancing at her.

THE JUSTICE: Defendant, what have you to say?

MME LUNEAU: Your honor, I say that this man is a liar.

THE JUSTICE: How can you prove this assertion?

MME LUNEAU (*red in the face, choking and stammering*): How can I prove it? What proofs have I? I haven't a single real proof that the child isn't his. But, your honor, it isn't his; I swear it on the head of my dead husband.

THE JUSTICE: Well, whose is it then?

MME LUNEAU (*stammering with rage*): How do I know? How do —do I know? Everybody's, I suppose. Here are my witnesses, your honor. They're all here, the six of them. Now make them testify. They'll tell——

THE JUSTICE: Collect yourself, Madame Luneau, collect yourself and reply calmly to my questions. What reasons have you to doubt that this man is the father of the child you are carrying?

MME LUNEAU: What reasons? I have a hundred to one, a hundred? No, two hundred, five hundred, ten thousand, a million and more reasons to believe he isn't. After the proposal I made to him, with the promise of one hundred francs, didn't I learn that he wasn't the father of his own children, your honor, not the father of one of 'em?

HIPPOLYTE (*calmly*): That's a lie.

MME LUNEAU (*exasperated*): A lie! A lie, is it? I guess his wife has been seen by everybody around here. Call my witnesses, your honor, and make them testify.

HIPPOLYTE (*calmly*): It's a lie.

MME LUNEAU: It's a lie, is it? How about the red-haired ones then? I suppose they're yours too?

THE JUSTICE: Kindly refrain from personal attacks, or I shall be obliged to call you to order.

MME LUNEAU: Well, your honor, I had my doubts about him, and said I to myself, two precautions are better than one, so I explained my position to Césaire Lepic, the witness who is present. Says he to me, "At your disposal, Madame Luneau," and he lent me his assistance in case Hippolyte should turn out to be unreliable. But as soon as the other witnesses heard that I wanted to make sure against any disappointment, I could have had more than a hundred, your honor, if I had wanted them. That tall one over there, Lucas Chandelier, swore at the time that I oughtn't to give Hippolyte Lacour a cent, for he hadn't done more than the rest of them who had obliged me for nothing.

HIPPOLYTE: What did you promise for? I expected the money, your honor. No mistake with me—a promise given, a promise kept.

MME LUNEAU (*beside herself*): One hundred francs! One hundred francs! One hundred francs for that, you liar! The others there didn't ask a red cent! Look at 'em, all six of 'em! Make them testify, your honor; they'll tell, sure. (*To Hippolyte.*) Look at 'em, you liar! they're as good as you. They're only six, but I could have had one, two, three, five hundred of 'em for nothing, too, you robber!

HIPPOLYTE: Well, even if you'd had a hundred thousand——

MME LUNEAU: I could, if I'd wanted 'em.

HIPPOLYTE: I did my duty, so it doesn't change matters.

MME LUNEAU (*slapping her protuberant form with both hands*): Then prove that it's you that did it; prove it, you robber! I defy you to prove it!

HIPPOLYTE (*calmly*): Maybe I didn't do any more than anybody else. But you promised me a hundred francs for it. What did you ask the others for afterward? You had no right to. I guess I could have done it alone.

MME LUNEAU: It is not true, robber! Call my witnesses, you honor; they'll answer, sure.

The justice calls the witnesses in behalf of the defense. Six red, awkward individuals appear.

THE JUSTICE: Lucas Chandelier, have you any reason to suppose that you are the father of the child Madame Luneau is carrying?

LUCAS CHANDELIER: Yes sir.

THE JUSTICE: Célestin-Pierre Sidoine, have you any reason to suppose that you are the father of the child Madame Luneau is carrying?

CÉLESTIN-PIERRE SIDOINE: Yes sir.

The four other witnesses testify to the same effect.

The justice, after a pause, pronounces judgment: Whereas the plaintiff has reasons to believe himself the father of the child which Madame Luneau desired, Lucas Chandelier, Célestin-Pierre Sidoine and others have similar, if not conclusive, reasons to lay claim to the child.

But whereas Madame Luneau had previously asked the assistance of Hippolyte Lacour for a duly stated consideration:

And whereas one may not question the absolute good faith of Hippolyte Lacour, though it is questionable whether he had a perfect right to enter into such an agreement, seeing that the plaintiff is married and compelled by the law to remain faithful to his lawful spouse:

Therefore the court condemns Madame Luneau to pay an indemnity of twenty-five francs to Hippolyte Lacour for loss of time and unjustifiable abduction.

BENOIST

IT ALL CAME OVER him one Sunday after Mass. He went out of church and followed the crossroad that led to his house, when he found himself behind the Martin girl who was also returning home.

The father walked beside his daughter with the important step of a rich farmer. Disdaining the blouse, he wore a kind of waistcoat of gray cloth and had on his head a melon-shaped hat with a wide brim. She, laced in a corset which she only wore once a week, walked very straight, her waist drawn in, her shoulders large, hips projecting, switching a little. Her hat was all flowers, the confection of an Yvetot milliner, and she showed her round, strong, supple neck, where little tendrils of hair were fluttering, moistened by the air and sun.

Benoist saw only her back, but he knew her face well, which was the reason he had noticed her still further. Suddenly he said to himself: "My, but she is pretty, just the same, that Martin girl!"

He looked at her as she walked along, admiring her crudely and feeling himself moved with desire. He had no need of seeing her face, none at all. He planted his eyes upon her figure, repeating to himself, as if he were speaking: "She is a pretty girl!"

The Martin girl turned to the right to enter Martinère, the farm of John Martin, her father. As she turned she looked back and saw Benoist, who looked queer to her. She cried out: "Good morning, Benoist." He answered: "Good morning, Mademoiselle Martin; good morning, Monsieur Martin," and passed on.

When he entered his house the soup was on the table. He seated himself opposite his mother, beside the hired man and boy, while the maidservant went to draw the cider. He ate a few spoonfuls then pushed his plate aside. His mother asked:

"What is the matter; don't you feel well?"

He answered: "No, I have something like a burning in my stomach and I have no appetite."

He watched the others eat, breaking off from time to time a mouthful of bread which he carried slowly to his lips and masticated a long time. He kept thinking of the Martin girl: "All the same, she is a pretty girl." And strange to say, he had never perceived it until this time, and now it had come to him so suddenly and so strongly that he was unable to eat any more. He scarcely touched his stew.

His mother said to him: "Come now, Benoist, do eat a little; it is a side of mutton and very good. When one has no appetite it is well to force oneself a little sometimes."

He swallowed a mouthful then pushed back his plate: "No, I cannot, decidedly."

Upon rising he made a tour of the farm and gave the boy a half holiday, promising to drive up the cattle in passing. The country was empty; it was a day of repose. From place to place in a field of clover the cows moved slowly, with bodies expanded, ruminating under the full sun. Some detached plows were standing in a corner of a plowed field, and the upturned earth, ready for the seed, displayed its large brown ridges in the midst of patches of yellow where bits of wheat and oat straw were left to decay after a late reaping.

An autumn wind, somewhat dry, was blowing over the plain, announcing a cool evening after sunset. Benoist sat down beside a ditch, put his hat on his knees as if he needed the air on his head and said aloud in the silence of the field: "When it comes to pretty girls, there is a pretty girl!"

He thought of her still in the evening in his bed and again on waking the next day. He was not sad; he was not discontented; he could not have told what was the trouble with him. But there was something which held him, something that fastened to his soul, an idea which would not leave him and which made a kind of tickling in his heart.

Sometimes we find a large fly shut up in a room. We hear it flying around and buzzing until the noise possesses us, irritates us. Suddenly it stops; we forget about it, but again it starts, forcing our attention. We can neither catch it nor kill it nor make it stay in place. Finally we resign ourselves to its humming. So the remembrance of the Martin girl agitated Benoist's mind; it was like an imprisoned fly.

Then a desire to see her again took possession of him, and he passed

and repassed before the Martin farm. He saw her at last, hanging some linen upon a line between two apple trees.

It was warm, and she was protected only by a short skirt and a chemise, which showed to advantage the white arch made by her arms as she pinned up the napkins. He lay flat beside the ditch for more than an hour after she had gone. He returned to find himself more haunted than before.

For a month his mind was full of her, so that he trembled when her name was mentioned before him. He could not eat and had night sweats which hindered his sleeping. On Sunday at Mass he could not keep his eyes away from her. She perceived it and smiled at him, flattered at being appreciated.

Then one evening he suddenly met her in the road. She stopped on seeing him approach. He walked straight to her, suffocated by a fear that seized him, but resolved to speak to her. He commenced stammering:

"See here, Mademoiselle Martin, I can't endure this any longer."

And she answered him mockingly: "What is it that you cannot endure, Benoist?"

He replied: "That I think about you as long as there are hours in the day."

Placing her hands on her hips, she answered: "It is not I who force you to."

He murmured: "Yes, it is you, and I can neither sleep nor eat nor rest nor nothing."

Very low she said: "What do you think is necessary to cure you of it?"

He was struck dumb, his arms twitching, his eyes round, his mouth open. She struck him a sharp blow in the chest and ran away as fast as she could.

From this day they often met by the ditches or in the crossroad, generally at the close of day, when he was returning with his horses and she was driving the cows to the stable. He felt himself drawn, thrown toward her, by some great impulse of heart and body. He felt a desire to press her close, to strangle her, to eat her and make her a part of himself. And he had tremblings from powerlessness, from impatience and rage, from the fact that she was his complement, making together but one being.

There began to be gossip in the country. It was said they were promised to one another. Indeed, he had asked her if she would be his wife, and she had answered: "Yes." They were only waiting for an opportunity to speak of it to their parents.

Then suddenly she no longer came at certain hours to meet him. He

could only get a glimpse of her at Mass on Sunday. And then one Sunday, after the sermon, the curate announced from the high pulpit that there was a promise of marriage between Victoire Adelaide Martin and Joseph Isidore Vallin.

Benoist felt as if he had raised blood. His ears buzzed; he could no longer hear anything, and he perceived after some time that he was weeping into his prayer book.

For a month he kept to his room. Then he began to work again. But he was not cured and still thought of her always. He shunned passing along the roads that surrounded her dwelling, not wishing to see even the trees of her yard, and this forced him to make a large circuit morning and evening.

She was now married to Vallin, the richest farmer in the district. Benoist no longer spoke to him, although they had been comrades since infancy.

Then one evening, as Benoist was passing across the common, he learned that she was *enceinte*. Instead of resenting this or its affecting him with a great grief, he found in it a kind of solace. It was finished now, well finished. They were more separated by this than by marriage. Truly, it was best so.

Some months passed, and still some months. He saw her sometimes, walking to the village with slow step. She blushed on seeing him, lowered her head and hastened her steps. And he turned out of his way in order not to cross her and look into her eyes.

But he thought, with the same terror as on that first morning, of finding himself face to face with her and obliged to speak to her. What could he say after all he had said to her in former times, holding her hands and kissing the locks about her cheeks? He still often thought of their meeting place by the side of the ditch. It was villainous to do as she did after so many promises.

However, little by little, anger left his heart; there was no longer anything but sadness. And one day he took his old way by the farm where she lived. He saw the roof of the house from afar. She was in there! Living with another! The apple trees were in blossom; the fowls were singing about the barnyard. The whole place seemed empty, the folk having gone to the fields for the spring work. He stopped near the fence and looked into the yard. The dog lay sleeping before his kennel.

Three calves were walking slowly, one behind the other, toward the pool. A large turkey cock was wheeling about before the door, parading before the poultry after the manner of a stage singer.

Benoist leaned against a post and suddenly felt himself seized with a desire to weep. But just then he heard a cry, a great, appealing cry, coming from the house. He stood lost in amazement, his hands clinched

upon the bars, ever listening. Another cry, prolonged, piercing, came to his ears and entered his soul and his flesh. It was she who was in trouble! She!

Finally he started hurriedly across the inclosure, pushed open the door and saw her stretched out upon the floor in agony, her face livid, her eyes haggard, seized with the pains of childbirth.

He stood there, paler and trembling more than she, murmuring:

"I am here, my friend; here I am."

And she replied in gasps: "Oh, do not leave me, Benoist; do not leave me!"

He looked at her, not knowing what to say or what to do. She began to cry out again: "Oh! Oh! This tears me in two! Oh! Benoist!"

And she seemed frightfully tortured. Suddenly a furious desire to help her came over Benoist; he must appease her suffering, free her from this agony. He bent over and took her up and carried her to her bed. And although she groaned continually, he then undressed her, taking off her kerchief, her frock and her skirt. She began to bite her hands in order not to cry out. Then he did for her as he was accustomed to do for beasts, cows, sheep and mares: he aided her and received into his hands a large infant, which began to squall.

He wiped it and wrapped it in a cloth which was drying before the fire, then placed it on a pile of linen that lay on the table and returned to the mother. He put her on the floor again, changed the bed and put her in it. She whispered: "Thanks, Benoist, you have a brave heart." And she wept a little, as if some regret had seized her.

As for him, he loved her no longer, not at all. It was finished. Why? How? He could not have told. What had come to pass had cured him better than ten years of absence.

She asked, weak and trembling: "What is it?"

He answered in a calm voice: "It is a girl, and a handsome one."

They were again silent. At the end of a few seconds the mother, in a feeble voice, said: "Show her to me, Benoist."

He went and got the little one and was presenting it to her, as if it were bread that had been blessed, when the door opened and Isidore Vallin appeared. He could not understand at first, then suddenly he guessed it all.

Benoist, somewhat disconcerted, murmured: "I was passing; I was just passing when I heard a cry—and I came. Here is your child, Vallin."

Then the husband, with tears in his eyes, took the frail little monkey that was held out to him, embraced it and stood for some seconds overcome; then he placed the child on the bed and extended both hands to Benoist, saying: "Done now, Benoist; you see, between us all is said."

If you wish we shall from this time be friends; just that, a pair of friends."

And Benoist replied: "I am willing; certainly—I am willing."

FECUNDITY

THEY WERE WALKING, these two old friends, in the garden all in blossom, where the gay springtime stirred with life.

One was a senator and the other a member of the French Academy, grave, both of them, full of reason and logic, but solemn—people of mark and reputation.

They were speaking at first of politics, exchanging thoughts, not upon ideas but men, personalities, which in these matters always precede reason. Then they rose to reminiscences; then they were silent, continuing to walk side by side, both softened by the sweetness of the air.

A great basket of radishes sent forth their odor, fresh and delicate. A heap of flowers of every kind and color threw their sweetness to the breeze, while a radiant ebony tree full of yellow berries scattered to the wind its fine powder, a golden smoke which reminded one of honey and which carried, like the caressing powder of the perfumer, its embalmed seed across space.

The senator stopped, breathed in the fertile sweetness that was floating by him, looked at the blossoming tree, resplendent as a sun, from which the pollen was now escaping. And he said:

"When one thinks that these imperceptible atoms, which smell good, can bring into existence in a hundred places, miles from here, plants of their own kind, can start the sap and fiber of the female trees, creating from a germ, as we mortals do, they seem mortal and they will be replaced by other beings of the same essence forever, like us!"

Then, planted before the radiant ebony tree whose vivifying perfume permeated every breath of air, the senator added, as if addressing it:

"Ah! My jolly fellow, if you were to count your children you would be woefully embarrassed. And behold! Here is one that accomplishes them easily, who lets himself go without remorse and disturbs himself little about it afterward."

The academician replied: "We do as much, my friend."

The senator answered: "Yes, I do not deny that: we do forget ourselves sometimes, but we know it, at least, and that constitutes our superiority."

The other man shook his head: "No, that is not what I mean; you see, my dear, there is scarcely a man who does not possess some unknown children, those children labeled *of unknown father*, whom he has created, as this tree reproduces itself, almost unconsciously.

"If it became necessary to establish the count of the women we have had, we should be, should we not? as embarrassed as this ebony tree, which you call upon to enumerate his descendants.

"From eighteen to forty, perhaps, bringing into line all our passing encounters and contacts of an hour, it can easily be admitted that we have had intimate relations with two or three hundred women. Ah well, my friend, among this number are you sure that you have not made fruitful at least one and that you have not, upon the streets or in prison, some blackguard son who robs and assassinates honest people, that is to say, people like us? Or perhaps a daughter in some bad place? Or perhaps, if she chanced to be abandoned by her mother, a cook in somebody's kitchen?

"Think further that nearly all women that we call 'public' possess one or two children whose father they do not know, children caught in the hazard of their embraces at ten or twenty francs. In every trade there is profit and loss. These castaways constitute the 'loss' of their profession. Who were their generators? You—I—all of us, the men who are 'all right!' These are the results of our joyous dinners to friends, of our evenings of gaiety, of the hours when our flesh contents us and pushes us on to the completion of adventure.

"Robbers, rovers, all these miserable creatures, in short, are our children. And how much better that is for us than if we were theirs, for they reproduce also, these beggars!

"For my part I have a villainous story upon my conscience which I would like to tell you. It brings me incessant remorse, and more than that, continual doubt and an unappeasable uncertainty which at times tortures me horribly.

"At the age of twenty-five I had undertaken, with one of my friends, now counselor of state, a journey through Brittany on foot.

"After fifteen or twenty days of forced march, after having visited the coasts of the north and a part of Finistère, we arrived at Douarnenez; from there, in a day's march, we reached the wildest point of the Raz by the bay of Trepasses, where we slept in some village whose name ends in *of*. When the morning came a strange fatigue held my comrade in bed. I say bed from habit, since our bed was composed simply of two boxes of straw.

"It was impossible to remain in such a place. I forced him to get up, and we came into Audierne toward four or five o'clock in the evening. The next day he was a little better. We set out again, but on the

way he was taken with intolerable weariness, and it was with great difficulty that we were able to reach Pont l'Abbé.

"There at least there was an inn. My friend went to bed, and the doctor, whom we called from Quimper, found a high fever without quite determining the nature of it.

"Do you know Pont l'Abbé? No? Well, it is the most characteristic Breton town from Point Raz to Morbihan—a region which contains the essence of Breton morals and legends and customs. Today, even, this corner of the country has scarcely changed at all. I say 'today, even,' because I return there now every year, alas!

"An old castle bathes the foot of its towers in a dismal pond, sad with the call of wild birds. A river, deep enough for coasters, comes up to the town. In the streets, narrowed by the old houses, the men wear great hats and embroidered waistcoats and the four coats, one above the other; the first, about the size of the hand, covers at least the shoulder blades, while the last stops just below the breeches.

"The girls, who are large, pretty and fresh looking, wear a bodice of thick cloth which forms a breastplate and corset, constraining and leaving scarcely a suspicion of their swelling, martyriized busts. Their headdresses are also of strange fashion: over the temples two embroidered bands in color frame the face, binding the hair which falls in a sheet behind the head, and is mounted by a singular bonnet on the very summit, often of tissue of gold or silver.

"The servant at our inn was eighteen years old or more, with blue eyes, a pale blue, which were pierced with the two little black dots of the pupils, and with teeth short and white, which she showed always in laughing and which seemed made for biting granite.

"She did not know a word of French, speaking only the Breton patois, as do most of her compatriots.

"Well, my friend was no better, and although no malady declared itself, the doctor forbade his setting out, ordering complete rest. I spent the days near him, the little maid coming in frequently, bringing perhaps my dinner or some drink for him.

"I teased her a little, which seemed to amuse her, but we did not talk, naturally, since we could not understand each other.

"But one night, when I had remained near the sick man very late, I met, in going to my chamber, the girl entering hers. It was just opposite my open door. Then brusquely, without reflecting upon what I was doing and more in the way of a joke than anything, I seized her around the waist, and before she was over her astonishment I had taken her and shut her in my room. She looked at me, startled, excited, terrified, not daring to cry out for fear of scandal and of being driven out by her master at first and her father afterward.

"I had done this in laughter, but when I saw her there, the desire to possess her carried me away. There was a long and silent struggle, a struggle of body against body after the fashion of athletes, with arms drawn, contracted, twisted, respiration short, skin moist with perspiration. Oh! she fought valiantly, and sometimes we would hit a piece of furniture, a partition or a chair; then, always clutching each other, we would remain immovable for some seconds in the fear of some noise that would awaken someone; then we would commence again our exciting battle, I attacking, she resisting. Exhausted, finally, she fell, and I took her brutally upon the ground, upon the floor.

"As soon as she was released she ran to the door, drew the bolts and fled. I scarcely met her for some days following. She would not allow me to approach her. Then when my comrade was strong and we were to continue our journey, on the eve of our departure, she entered my apartment at midnight, barefooted, in her chemise, just as I was about to retire.

"She threw herself in my arms, drew me to her passionately and, until daylight, embraced me, caressed me, weeping and sobbing, giving me all the assurances of tenderness and despair that a woman can give when she does not know a word of our language.

"A week after this I had forgotten this adventure, so common and frequent when on a journey, the servants of the inns being generally destined to divert travelers thus.

"Thirty years passed without my thinking of, or returning to, Pont l'Abbé. Then in 1876, in the course of an excursion through Brittany, I happened to go there, as I was compiling a document which required statistics from the various parts of the country.

"Nothing seemed to have changed. The castle still soaked its gray walls in the pond at the entrance of the little town; the inn was there, too, although repaired, remodeled, with a modern air. On entering I was received by two young Bretons, of about eighteen, fresh and genteel, enlaced in their straight girdles of cloth and encapped with silver embroidery over their ears.

"It was about six o'clock in the evening. I had sat down to dine when the host, coming to serve me himself—fatality, without doubt—led me to ask him: 'Did you know the former master of this house? I passed a fortnight here once thirty years ago. I seem to be speaking to you from afar.

"He answered: 'Those were my parents, sir.'

"Then I recounted the occasion of my stopping there, recalling my being detained by the illness of my comrade. He did not allow me to finish.

"'Oh! I remember that perfectly,' he said; 'I was fifteen or sixteen

then. You slept in the room at the end of the hall and your friend in the one that is now mine, upon the street.'

"Then for the first time a lively remembrance of the pretty maid came back to me. I asked: 'You recall a genteel, pretty servant that your father had, who had, if I remember, sparkling eyes and fine teeth?'

"He replied: 'Yes sir; she died in childbed some time after.'

"And, pointing toward the courtyard where a thin, lame man was taking out some manure, he added: 'That is her son.'

"I began to laugh. 'He is not beautiful and does not resemble his mother at all. Takes after his father, no doubt.'

"The innkeeper replied: 'It may be, but they never knew who his father was. She died without telling, and no one here knew she had a lover. It was a famous surprise when we found it out. No one was willing to believe it.'

"A kind of disagreeable shiver went over me, one of those painful suggestions that touch the heart, like the approach of a heavy vexation. I looked at the man in the yard. He came now to draw some water for the horses and carried two pails, limping, making grievous effort with the limb that was shorter. He was ragged and hideously dirty, with long yellow hair, so matted that it hung in strings on his cheeks.

"The innkeeper added: 'He doesn't amount to anything but is taken care of by charity in the house. Perhaps he would have turned out better if he had been brought up like anybody. But you see how it is, sir? No father, no mother, no money! My parents took pity on him as a child, but after all—he was not theirs, you see.'

"I said nothing.

"I went to bed in my old room, and all night I could think of nothing but that frightful hostler, repeating to myself: 'What if that were my son? Could I have killed that girl and brought that creature into existence?'

"It was possible, surely. I resolved to speak to this man and to find out exactly the date of his birth. A difference of two months would arrest my doubts.

"I had him come to me the next day. But he could not speak French at all. He had the appearance of understanding nothing. Besides, he was absolutely ignorant of his age, which one of the maids asked him for me. And he held himself with the air of an idiot before me, rolling his cap in his knotty paws, laughing stupidly, with something of the old laugh of the mother in the corners of his mouth and eyes.

"But the host, becoming interested, went to look up his birth on the records. He entered into life eight months and twenty-six days after my departure from Pont l'Abbé, because I recalled perfectly arriving at

Lorient on the fifteenth of August. The record said: 'Father unknown.' The mother was called Jeanne Karradec.

"Then my heart began to beat with pressing blows. I could not speak, so suffocated did I feel. And I looked at that brute, whose long yellow hair seemed dirty and more tangled than that of beasts. And the beggar, constrained by my look, ceased to laugh, turned his head and took himself off.

"Every day I would wander along the little river, sadly reflecting. But to what good? Nothing could help me. For hours and hours I would weigh all the reasons, good and bad, for and against the chances of my paternity, placing myself in inextricable positions, only to return again to the horrible suspicion, then to the conviction, more atrocious still, that this man was my son.

"I could not dine and I retired to my room. It was a long time before I could sleep. Then sleep came, a sleep haunted with insupportable visions. I could see this ninny laughing in my face and calling me 'Papa.' Then he would change into a dog and bite me in the calf of my leg; in vain I tried to free myself; he would follow me always and, in place of barking, he would speak, abusing me. Then he would go before my colleagues at the Academy called together for the purpose of deciding whether I was his father. And one of them cried: 'It is indubitable! See how he resembles him!'

"And in fact, I perceived that the monster did resemble me. And I awoke with this idea planted in my brain and with the foolish desire to see the man again and decide whether he did or did not have features in common with my own.

"I joined him as he was going to Mass (it was on Sunday) and gave him a hundred sous, scanning his face anxiously. He began to laugh in ignoble fashion, took the money; then, again constrained by my eye, he fled after having blurted out a word, almost inarticulate, which meant to say 'Thank you,' without doubt.

"That day passed for me in the same agony as the preceding. Toward evening I went to the proprietor and, with much caution, clothing of words, finesse and roundabout conversation, I told him that I had become interested in this poor being so abandoned by everybody and so deprived of everything and that I wished to do something for him.

"The man replied: 'Oh, don't worry about him, sir. He wants nothing; you will only make trouble for yourself. I employ him to clean the stable, and it is all that he can do. For that, I feed him, and he sleeps with the horses. He needs nothing more. If you have some old clothes give them to him, but they will be in pieces in a week.'

"I did not insist, reserving my opinion.

"The beggar returned that evening, horribly drunk, almost setting

fire to the house, striking one of the horses a blow with a pickax and finally ended the score by going to sleep in the mud out in the rain, thanks to my generosity. They begged me the next day not to give him any more money. Liquor made him furious, and when he had two sous in his pocket he drank it. The innkeeper added: "To give him money is the same as wishing to kill him." This man had absolutely never had any money, save a few centimes thrown to him by travelers, and he knew no other destination for it but the alehouse.

"Then I passed some hours in my room with an open book which I made a semblance of reading, but without accomplishing anything except to look at this brute. My son! My son! I was trying to discover if he was anything like me. By force of searching I believed I recognized some similar lines in the brow and about the nose. And I was immediately convinced of a resemblance which only different clothing and the hideous mane of the man disguised.

"I could not stay there very long without becoming suspected, and I set out with breaking heart after having left with the innkeeper some money to sweeten the existence of his valet.

"For six years I lived with this thought, this horrible uncertainty, this abominable doubt. And each year I condemned myself to the punishment of seeing this brute wallow in his filth, imagining that he resembles me and of seeking, always in vain, to be helpful to him.

"And each year I come back more undecided, more tortured, more anxious. I have tried to have him instructed, but he is an idiot without resource. I have tried to render life less painful to him, but he is an irremediable drunkard and uses all the money that is given him for drink. And he knows very well how to sell his clothes and procure liquor.

"I have tried to arouse pity in his employer for him, that he might treat him more gently, offering him money always. The innkeeper, astonished, finally remarked very sagely: 'All this that you would like to do for him only ruins him. He must be kept like a prisoner. As soon as he has time given him or favors shown, he becomes unmanageable. If you wish to do good to abandoned children, choose one that will respond to your trouble.'

"What could I say to that?

"And if I should disclose a suspicion of the doubts which torture me, this creature would certainly turn rogue and exploit me, compromise me, ruin me. He would cry out to me, 'Papa,' as in my dream.

"And I tell myself that I have killed the mother and ruined this atrophied being, larva of the stable, hatched and bred of vileness, this man who, treated as others are, might have been like others.

"And you will not understand the sensation, strange, confused and

intolerable, the fear I have in his presence, from thinking that this has come from me, that he belongs to me by that intimate bond which binds father to son, that, thanks to the terrible laws of heredity, he is a part of me in a thousand things, by his blood and his hair and his flesh, and that he has the same germs of sickness and the same ferments of passion.

"And I have ever an unappeasable need of seeing him, and the sight of him makes me suffer horribly, and from my window down there I look at him as he works in the dunghill of the beasts, repeating to myself: 'That is my son!'

"And I feel, sometimes, an intolerable desire to embrace him. But I have never even touched his sordid hand."

The academician was silent. And his companion, the political man, murmured: "Yes indeed; we ought to occupy ourselves a little more with the children who have no fathers."

Then a breath of wind traversing the great tree shook its berries and enveloped with a fine, odorous cloud the two old men, who took long draughts of the sweet perfume.

And the senator added: "It is good to be twenty-five years old, and it is even good to have children like that."

A WAY TO WEALTH

"DO YOU KNOW what has become of Leremy?"

"He is captain of the Sixth Dragoons."

And Pinson?"

"Subprefect."

"And Racollet?"

"Dead."

We hunted up other names which recalled to us young figures crowned with caps trimmed with gold braid. Later we found some of these comrades, bearded, bald, married, the fathers of many children; and these meetings, these changes, gave us some disagreeable shivers, as they showed us how short life is, how quickly everything changes and passes away.

My friend asked: "And Patience, the great Patience?"

I roared.

"Oh! If you want to hear about him, listen to me: Four or five weeks ago, as traveling inspector at Limoges, I was awaiting the dinner hour. Seated before the Grand Café in Theater Square, I closed

my eyes wearily. The tradesmen were coming in twos, or threes or fours, taking their absinthe or vermouth, talking in a loud voice of their business and that of others, laughing violently or lowering their voices when they communicated something important or delicate.

"I said to myself: 'What am I going to do after dinner?' And I thought of the long evening in this provincial town, of the slow, uninteresting walks through the unknown streets, of the overwhelming sadness which takes possession of the solitary traveler, of the people who pass, strangers in all things and through all things, the cut of their provincial coats, their hats, their trousers, their customs, local accent, their houses, shops and carriages of singular shape. And then the ordinary sounds to which one is not accustomed, the harassing sadness which presses itself upon you little by little until you feel as if you were lost in a dangerous country, which oppresses you and makes you wish yourself back at the hotel, the hideous hotel, where your room preserves a thousand suspicious odors, where the bed makes one hesitate and the basin has a hair glued in the dirt at the bottom.

"I thought about all this as I watched them light the gas, feeling my isolated distress increase by the falling of the shadows. What was I going to do after dinner? I was alone, entirely alone, and lamentably lonesome.

"A big man came in, seated himself at a neighboring table and commanded in a formidable voice:

"'Waiter, my bitters.'

"The 'my' in the phrase sounded like the report of a cannon. I understood immediately that everything in existence was his, belonged to him and not to any other, that he had his character and, by Jove! his appetite, his pantaloons, his no matter what, after his own fashion, absolute and more complete than important. He looked about him with a satisfied air. They brought him his bitters and he called:

"'My paper.'

"I asked myself: 'Which is his paper, I wonder?' The name of that would certainly reveal to me his opinions, his theories, his hobbies and his nature.

"The waiter brought the *Times*. I was surprised. Why the *Times*, a grave, somber, doctrinal, heavy journal? I thought:

"'He is then a wise man, of serious ways, regular habits, in short, a good commoner.'

"He placed on his nose some gold eyeglasses, turned around and, before commencing to read, cast another glance all around the room. He noticed me and immediately began to look at me in a persistent, uneasy fashion. I was on the point of asking him the reason for his attention, when he cried out from where he sat:

"By my pipe, if it is not Gontran Lardois!"

"I answered: 'Yes sir, you have not deceived yourself.'

"Then he got up brusquely and came toward me with outstretched hands.

"Ah, my old friend, how are you?" he asked.

"My greeting was constrained, not knowing him at all. Finally I stammered:

"Why—very well—and you?"

"He began to laugh: 'It appears that you do not know me.'

"No, not quite. It seems to me—however——"

"He tapped me on the shoulder.

"There, there! Not to bother you any longer, I am Patience, Robert Patience, your chum, your comrade.'

"I recognized him. Yes, Robert Patience, my comrade at college. It was no other. I pressed the hand he extended to me and said:

"Everything going well with you?"

"With me? Like a charm.'

"His laugh rang with triumph. He inquired:

"What has brought you here?"

"I explained to him that I was inspector of finances, making the rounds.

"He replied, observing my badge: 'Then you are successful?'

"I replied: 'Yes, rather; and you?'

"Oh! I? Very, very!'

"What are you doing now?"

"I am in business.'

"Then you are making money?"

"Lots of it. I am rich. But come to lunch with me tomorrow at noon, number 17 Coq-qui-chante Street; then you will see my place.'

"He appeared to hesitate a second then continued:

"You are still the good rounder of former times?"

"Yes, I hope so.'

"Not married?"

"No.'

"So much the better. And you are still as fond of fun and potatoes?"

"I commenced to find him deplorably commonplace. I answered, nevertheless: 'Yes.'

"And pretty girls?"

"As to that, yes.'

"He began to laugh with a good, hearty laugh.

"So much the better; so much the better,' he said. 'You recall our first farce at Bordeaux, when we had supper at the Roupie coffee-house? Ha! What a night!'

"I recalled that night, surely, and the memory of it amused me. Other facts were brought to mind and still others. One would say:

"Do you remember the time we shut up the fawn in Father La-toque's cellar?"

"And he would laugh, striking his fist upon the table, repeating:

"Yes—yes—yes—and you remember the mouth of the professor in geography, Monsieur Marin, when we sent off a cracker on the map of the world just as he was orating on the principal volcanoes of the earth?"

"Then brusquely I asked him:

"And you, are you married?"

"He cried: 'For ten years, my dear fellow, and I have four children, most astonishing monkeys, but you will see them and their mother.'

"We were talking loud; the neighbors were looking around at us in astonishment. Suddenly my friend looked at his watch, a chronometer as large as a citron, and cried out:

"Thunder! It is rude, but I shall have to leave you; I am not free this evening."

"He rose, took both my hands and shook them, as if he wished to break off my arms, and said:

"Tomorrow at noon, you remember?"

"I remember."

"I passed the morning at work at the house of the general treasurer. He wished to keep me for luncheon, but I told him that I had an appointment with a friend. He accompanied me out. I asked him:

"Do you know where Coq-qui-chante Street is?"

"He answered: 'Yes, it is five minutes from here. As I have nothing to do, I will conduct you there.'

"And we set out on the way. Soon I noticed the street we sought. It was wide, pretty enough, at the border of the town and the country. I noticed the houses and perceived number 17. It was a kind of hotel with a garden at the back. The front, ornamented with frescoes in the Italian fashion, appeared to me in bad taste. There were goddesses hanging to urns and others whose secret beauties a cloud concealed. Two stone Cupids held up the number.

"I said to the treasurer: 'Here is where I am going.'

"And I extended my hand by way of leaving him. He made a brusque and singular gesture but said nothing, pressing the hand held out to him. I rang. A maid appeared. I said:

"Monsieur Patience, if you please. Is he at home?"

"She replied: 'He is here, sir. Do you wish to speak with him?'"

"Yes."

"The vestibule was ornamented with paintings from the brush of

some local artist. Paul and Virginia were embracing under some palms drowned in a rosy light. A hideous oriental lantern hung from the ceiling. There were many doors, masked by showy hangings. But that which struck me particularly was the odor—a permeating, perfumed odor, recalling rice powder and the moldiness of cellars—an indefinable odor in a heavy atmosphere, as overwhelming as stifling, in which the human body becomes petrified. I ascended, behind the maid, a marble staircase which was covered by a carpet of some oriental kind and was led into a sumptuous drawing room.

“Left alone, I looked about me.

“The room was richly furnished, but with the pretension of an ill-bred parvenu. The engravings of the last century were pretty enough, representing women with high, powdered hair and very low-cut bodices surprised by gallant gentlemen in interesting postures. Another lady was lying on a great bed, toying with her foot with a little dog drowned in draperies. Another resisted her lover complacently, whose hand was in a suspicious place. One design showed four feet whose bodies could be divined, although concealed behind a curtain. The vast room, surrounded by soft divans, was entirely impregnated with this enervating odor which had already taken hold of me. There was something suspicious about these walls, these stuffs, this exaggerated luxury, in short, the whole place.

“I approached the window to look into the garden, of which I could see but the trees. It was large, shady, superb. A broad path was outlined on the turf, where a jet of water was playing in the air, brought in under some masonry some distance off. And suddenly three women appeared down there at the end of the garden, between two shapely shrubs. They were walking slowly, taking hold of each other’s arms, clothed in long white dresses clouded with lace. Two of them were blonde and the other a brunette.

“They disappeared immediately among the trees. I remained transfixed, charmed, before this short but delightful apparition, which brought surging to my mind a whole poetic world. They were scarcely to be seen at all in that bower of leaves at the end of the park, so secluded and delicious. I must have dreamed, and these were the beautiful ladies of the last century wandering under the elm-tree hedge, the ladies whose light loves the clever gravures on the walls recalled. And I thought of those happy times, flowery, incorporeal, tender, when customs were so sweet and lips so easy.

“A great voice behind me made me leap back into the room. Patience had come in, radiant, extending both his hands.

“He looked at me out of the end of his eyes with the sly air of some amorous confidence and, with a large, comprehensive gesture, a Na-

poleonic gesture, pointed out his sumptuous drawing room, his park, with the three women passing again at the back, and in a triumphant voice that sang of pride said:

“And when you think that I commenced with nothing—my wife and my sisters-in-law!”

AM I INSANE?

AM I INSANE or jealous? I know not which, but I suffer horribly. I committed a crime, it is true, but is not insane jealousy, betrayed love and the terrible pain I endure enough to make anyone commit a crime without actually being a criminal?

I have loved this woman to madness—and yet is it true? Did I love her? No, no! She owned me body and soul; I was her plaything; she ruled me by her smile, her look, the divine form of her body. It was all those things that I loved, but the woman contained in that body, I despise her, hate her. I always have hated her, for she is but an impure, perfidious creature in whom there was no soul; even less than that, she is but a mass of soft flesh in which dwells infamy!

The first few months of our union were deliciously strange. Her eyes were three different colors. No, I am not insane; I swear they were. They were gray at noon, shaded green at twilight and blue at sunrise. In moments of love they were blue, the pupils dilated and nervous. Her lips trembled, and often the tip of her pink tongue could be seen as that of a reptile ready to hiss. When she raised her heavy lids and I saw that ardent look, I shuddered, not only for the unceasing desire to possess her, but for the desire to kill this beast.

When she walked across the room each step resounded in my heart. When she disrobed and emerged infamous but radiant from the white mass of linen and lace, a sudden weakness seized me; my limbs gave way beneath me, and my chest heaved; I was faint, coward that I was!

Each morning when she awakened I waited for that first look; my heart filled with rage, hatred and disdain for this beast whose slave I was, but when she fixed those limpid blue eyes on me, that languishing look showing traces of lassitude, it was like a burning, unquenchable fire within me, inciting me to passion.

When she opened her eyes that day I saw a dull, indifferent look, a look devoid of desire, and I knew then she was tired of me. I saw it, knew it, felt right away that it was all over, and each hour and

minute proved to me that I was right. When I beckoned her with my arms and lips she shrank from me.

"Leave me alone," she said. "You are horrid!"

Then I became suspicious, insanely jealous, but I am not insane, no indeed! I watched her slyly, not that she had betrayed me, but she was so cold that I knew another would soon take my place.

At times she would say:

"Men disgust me!" Alas! It was too true.

Then I became jealous of her indifference, of her thoughts, which I knew to be impure, and when she awakened sometimes with that same look of lassitude I suffocated with anger, and an irresistible desire to choke her and make her confess the shameful secrets of her heart took hold of me.

Am I insane? No.

One night I saw that she was happy. I felt, in fact I was convinced, that a new passion ruled her. As of old, her eyes shone; she was feverish, and her whole self fluttered with love.

I feigned ignorance, but I watched her closely. I discovered nothing, however. I waited a week, a month, almost a year. She was radiantly, ideally happy, as if soothed by some ephemeral caress.

At last I guessed. No, I am not insane; I swear I am not. How can I explain this inconceivable, horrible thing? How can I make myself understood? This is how I guessed.

She came in one night from a long ride on horseback and sank exhausted in a seat facing me. An unnatural flush tinted her cheeks, and her eyes—those eyes that I knew so well—had such a look in them. I was not mistaken; I had seen her look like that; she loved! But whom? What? I almost lost my head, and so as not to look at her I turned to the window. A valet was leading her horse to the stable, and she stood and watched him disappear; then she fell asleep almost immediately. I thought and thought all night. My mind wandered through mysteries too deep to conceive. Who can fathom the perversity and strange caprices of a sensual woman?

Every morning she rode madly through hills and dales and each time came back languid, exhausted. At last I understood. It was of the horse I was jealous—of the wind which caressed her face, of the drooping leaves and of the dewdrops, of the saddle which carried her! I resolved to be revenged. I became very attentive. Every time she came back from her ride I helped her down, and the horse made a vicious rush at me. She would pat him on the neck, kiss his quivering nostrils without even wiping her lips. I watched my chance.

One morning I got up before dawn and went to the path in the woods she loved so well. I carried a rope with me, and my pistols were

hidden in my breast, as if I were going to fight a duel. I drew the rope across the path, tying it to a tree on each side, and hid myself in the grass. Presently I heard her horse's hoofs; then I saw her coming at a furious pace, her cheeks flushed, an insane look in her eyes. She seemed enraptured, transported into another sphere.

As the animal approached the rope he struck it with his fore feet and fell. Before she had struck the ground I caught her in my arms and helped her to her feet. I then approached the horse, put my pistol close to his ear and shot him—as I would a man.

She turned on me and dealt me two terrific blows across the face with her riding whip which felled me, and as she rushed at me again I shot her!

Tell me, am I insane?

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

BEFORE MARRIAGE they had loved each other chastely in the starlight. At first there was a charming meeting on the shore of the ocean. He found her delicious, the rosy young girl who passed him with her bright umbrellas and fresh costumes on the marine background. He loved this blonde, fragile creature in her setting of blue waves and immense skies. And he confounded the tenderness which this scarcely fledged woman caused to be born in him with the vague and powerful emotion awakened in his soul, in his heart and in his veins by the lovely salt air and the great seascape full of sun and waves.

She loved him because he paid her attention, because he was young and rich enough, genteel and delicate. She loved him because it is natural for young ladies to love young men who say tender words to them.

Then for three months they lived side by side, eye to eye and hand to hand. The greeting which they exchanged in the morning before the bath, in the freshness of the new day, and the adieu of the evening upon the sand under the stars, in the warmth of the calm night, murmured low and still lower, had already the taste of kisses although their lips had never met.

They dreamed of each other as soon as they were asleep, thought of each other as soon as they awoke and, without yet saying so, called for and desired each other with their whole soul and body.

After marriage they adored each other above everything on earth. It was at first a kind of sensual, indefatigable rage, then an exalted tenderness made of palpable poesy, of caresses already refined and of

inventions both genteel and ungenteel. All their looks signified something impure, and all their gestures recalled to them the ardent intimacy of the night.

Now, without confessing it, without realizing it, perhaps, they commenced to weary of one another. They loved each other, it is true, but there was nothing more to reveal, nothing more to do that had not often been done, nothing more to learn from each other, not even a new word of love, an unforeseen motion or an intonation, which sometimes is more expressive than a known word too often repeated.

They forced themselves, however, to relight the flame, enfeebled from the first embraces. They invented some new and tender artifice each day, some simple or complicated ruse, in the vain attempt to renew in their hearts the unappeasable ardor of the first days and in their veins the flame of the nuptial month.

From time to time, by dint of whipping their desire, they again found an hour of factitious excitement which was immediately followed by a disgusting lassitude.

They tried moonlight walks under the leaves in the sweetness of the night, the poesy of the cliffs bathed in mist, the excitement of public festivals.

Then one morning Henrietta said to Paul:

"Will you take me to dine at an inn?"

"Why, yes, my dearie."

"In a very well-known inn?"

"Yes."

He looked at her, questioning with his eye, understanding well that she had something in mind which she had not spoken.

She continued: "You know, an inn—how shall I explain it?—in a gallant inn, where people make appointments to meet each other?"

He smiled. "Yes. I understand, a private room in a large café?"

"That is it. But in a large café where you are known, where you have already taken supper—no, dinner—that is—I mean—I want—no, I do not dare say it!"

"Speak out, *chérie*; between us what can it matter? We are not like those who have little secrets from each other."

"No, I dare not."

"Oh! Come, now! Don't be so innocent. Say it."

"Well—oh! Well—I wish—I wish to be taken for your mistress—and that the waiters, who do not know that you are married, may look upon me as your mistress, and you, too—that for an hour you believe me your mistress in that very place where you have remembrances of—— That's all! And I myself will believe that I am your mistress. I want to commit a great sin—to deceive you—with yourself—there!

It is very bad, but that is what I want to do. Do not make me blush—I feel that I am blushing—imagine—my wanting to take the trouble to dine with you in a place not quite the thing—in a private room where people devote themselves to love every evening—every evening. It is very bad. I am as red as a peony! Don't look at me!"

He laughed, very much amused, and responded:

"Yes, we will go this evening to a very chic place where I am known."

Toward seven o'clock they mounted the staircase of a large café on the boulevard, he smiling, with the air of a conqueror, she timid, veiled, but delighted. When they were in a little room furnished with four armchairs and a large sofa covered with red velvet, the steward, in black clothes, entered and presented the bill of fare. Paul passed it to his wife.

"What do you wish to eat?" he said.

"I don't know; what do they have that is good here?"

Then he read off the list of dishes while taking off his overcoat, which he handed to a waiter. Then he said:

"Serve this menu: Bisque soup, deviled chicken, sides of hare, duck, American style, vegetable salad and desert. We will drink champagne."

The steward smiled and looked at the young lady. He took the card, murmuring: "Will Monsieur Paul have a cordial or some champagne?"

"Champagne, very dry."

Henrietta was happy to find that this man knew her husband's name. They sat down side by side upon the sofa and began to eat.

Ten candles lighted the room, reflected in a great mirror, mutilated by the thousands of names traced on it with a diamond, making on the clear crystal a kind of huge cobweb.

Henrietta drank glass after glass to animate her, although she felt giddy from the first one. Paul, excited by certain memories, kissed his wife's hand repeatedly. Her eyes were brilliant.

She felt strangely moved by this suspicious situation; she was excited and happy, although she felt a little defiled. Two grave waiters, mute, accustomed to seeing everything and forgetting all, entered only when it was necessary and went out in the moments of overflow, going and coming quickly and softly.

Toward the middle of the dinner Henrietta was tipsy, completely tipsy, and Paul, in his gaiety, pressed her knee with all his force. She prattled now, boldly, her cheeks red, her look lively and dizzy.

"Oh, come, Paul," she said, "confess now, won't you? I want to know all."

"What do you mean, *chérie*?"

"I dare not say it."

"But you must always——"

"Have you had mistresses—many of them—before me?"

He hesitated, a little perplexed, not knowing whether he ought to conceal his good fortunes or boast of them.

She continued: "Oh! I beg you to tell me; have you had many?"

"Why, some."

"How many?"

"I don't know. How can one know such things?"

"You cannot count them?"

"Why, no!"

"Oh! Then you have had very many?"

"Yes."

"How many, do you suppose?—somewhere near——"

"I don't know at all, my dear. Some years I had many and some only a few."

"How many a year, should you say?"

"Sometimes twenty or thirty, sometimes four or five only."

"Oh! That makes more than a hundred women in all."

"Yes, somewhere near."

"Oh! How disgusting!"

"Why disgusting?"

"Because it is disgusting—when one thinks of all those women—bare—and always—always the same thing. Oh! It is disgusting all the same—more than a hundred women."

He was shocked that she thought it disgusting and responded with that superior air which men assume to make women understand that they have said something foolish:

"Well, that is curious! If it is disgusting to have a hundred women, it is equally disgusting to have one."

"Oh no, not at all!"

"Why not?"

"Because with one woman there is intrigue, there is a love that attaches you to her, while with a hundred women there is filthiness, misconduct. I cannot understand how a man can meddle with all those girls who are so foul."

"No, they are very neat."

"One cannot be neat, carrying on a trade like that."

"On the contrary, it is because of their trade that they are neat."

"Oh, pshaw! When one thinks of the nights they pass with others! It is ignoble!"

"It is no more ignoble than drinking from a glass from which I know

not who drank this morning, and that has been less thoroughly washed—you may be certain of it."

"Oh, be still; you are revolting."

"But why ask me then if I have had mistresses?"

"Then tell me, were your mistresses all girls, all of them—the whole hundred?"

"Why, no—no. Some were actresses—some little working girls—and some women of the world."

"How many of them were women of the world?"

"Six."

"Only six?"

"Yes."

"Were they pretty?"

"Yes, of course."

"Prettier than the girls?"

"No."

"Which did you prefer, girls or women of the world?"

"Women of the world."

"Oh! How filthy! Why?"

"Because I do not care much for amateur talent."

"Oh! Horror! You are abominable, do you know it? But tell me, is it very amusing to pass from one to another like that?"

"Yes, rather."

"Very?"

"Very."

"What is there amusing about it? Is it because they do not resemble each other?"

"They do not."

"Ah! The women do not resemble each other?"

"Not at all."

"In nothing?"

"In nothing."

"That is strange! In what respect do they differ?"

"In every respect."

"In body?"

"Yes, in body."

"In the whole body?"

"Yes, in the whole body."

"And in what else?"

"Why, in the manner of—of embracing, of speaking, of saying the least thing."

"Ah! And it is very amusing, this changing?"

"Yes."

"And are men different too?"

"That I do not know."

"You do not know?"

"No."

"They must be different."

"Yes, without doubt."

She remained pensive, her glass of champagne in her hand. It was full, and she drank it at a draught; then placing the glass upon the table, she threw both arms around her husband's neck and murmured in his mouth:

"Oh, my dear, how I love you!" He seized her in a passionate embrace.

A waiter, who was entering, drew back, closing the door, and the service was interrupted for about five minutes.

When the steward again appeared, with a grave, dignified air, bringing in the fruits for the dessert, she was holding another glassful between her fingers and, looking to the bottom of the yellow, transparent liquid, as if to see there things unknown and dreamed of, she murmured with a thoughtful voice:

"Oh yes! It must be very amusing, all the same!"

THE CHARM DISPELLED

THE BOAT WAS FILLED with people. As the passage promised to be good, many people of Havre were making a trip to Trouville.

They loosed the moorings; a last whistle announced the departure, and immediately the entire body of the vessel shook, while a sound of stirring water was heard all along the sides. The wheels turned for some seconds, stopped and then started gently. The captain upon his bridge having cried, "Go ahead!" through the tube which extends into the depths of the machinery, they now began to beat the waves with great rapidity.

We passed along the pier covered with people. Some that were on the boat waved their handkerchiefs, as if they were setting out for America, and the friends who remained behind responded in the same fashion.

The great July sun fell upon the red umbrellas, the bright costumes, the joyous faces and upon the ocean, scarcely moved by any undulations. As soon as they had left the port the little vessel made a sharp turn, pointing its nose directly for the far-off coast rising to meet the foam.

On our left was the mouth of the Seine, more than twelve miles

wide. Here and there great buoys pointed out banks of sand, and one could see at a distance the fresh, muddy water of the river, which had not yet mingled with the salt brine, outlined in broad, yellow stripes upon the immense, pure green sheet of the open sea.

As soon as I boarded the boat I felt the need of walking up and down, like a sailor on his watch. Why? That I cannot say. But I began to circulate among the crowd of passengers on deck.

Suddenly someone called my name. I turned around. It was Henry Sidonie, whom I had not seen for ten years.

After we had shaken hands we resumed the walk of a bear in his cage, which I had been taking alone, while we talked of people and things. And we looked at the two lines of travelers seated on both sides of the boat, chatting all the while.

All at once Sidonie exclaimed with a veritable expression of rage: "It is crowded with English here! Nasty people!"

The boat was full of English, in fact. Men standing about scanned the horizon with an important air which seemed to say: "It is the English who are masters of the sea! Boom! Boom! Here we are!"

And the white veils upon their white hats had the air of flags in their self-sufficiency.

The thin young girls, whose boots recalled the naval construction of their country, wrapping their straight figures and thin arms in multi-colored shawls, smiled vaguely at the radiant landscape. Their little heads, perched on the top of their long bodies, wearing the peculiarly shaped English hat, were finished at the back of the neck by their thin hair, coiled around to resemble sleeping adders.

And the old spinsters, still more lank, opening to the wind their national jaw, appeared to threaten space with their enormous yellow teeth. In passing near them one smells an odor of caoutchouc or some kind of dentifrice.

Sidonie repeated with an increasing anger:

"Nasty people! Why couldn't they be hindered from coming to France?"

I inquired laughingly: "Why, what do you care? As for me, I am perfectly indifferent to them."

He answered: "Yes, you are, indeed! But I—I married an English-woman. And there you have it!"

I stopped and laughed in his face. "The devil!" I said; "tell me about it. Has she made you so unhappy?"

He shrugged his shoulders as he replied: "No, not precisely."

"Then she—she has—deceived you?"

"Unfortunately, no. That would give me a cause for divorce, and I should be free."

"But I do not understand."

"You do not understand? That is not astonishing. Well, she simply learned the French language, nothing more! Listen:

"I had never had the least desire to marry when I went to pass the summer at Etretat two years ago. But there is nothing more dangerous than watering places. One cannot imagine to what an advantage young girls are seen there. Paris may be for women, but the country is for young girls.

"The idiotic promenades, the morning baths, lunches upon the grass, all are so many snares for marriage. And truly, there is nothing prettier than a girl of eighteen running across a field or picking flowers along the road.

"I made the acquaintance of an English family living at the same hotel as myself. The father resembled the men you see there, and the mother all other Englishwomen. They had two sons, boys all bones, who played at violent games with balls, sticks or rackets from morning until evening; then two girls, the elder a lean, well-preserved Englishwoman of maturity, the younger a wonder. She was a blonde, or rather a blondine, with a head that came from the skies. When they do undertake to be pretty, these wretches, they are divine. She had blue eyes, of the blue which seems to contain all the poetry, dreams, hopes and happiness of the world!

"What a horizon of infinite thought opens before you in the two eyes of a woman like that! How well she responds to the eternal, vague expectation of our hearts!

"It is only necessary to remember that Frenchmen always adore foreigners. As soon as we meet a Russian, an Italian, a Swede, a Spanish or an Englishwoman at all pretty, we fall in love with her immediately. Everything that comes from abroad fills us with enthusiasm, whether it be trouser cloth, hats, gloves, guns or—women. We are wrong, nevertheless.

"But I believe the most seductive thing about these exotics is their faulty pronunciation of our language. As soon as a woman speaks French badly she is charming. If she uses a wrong word she is exquisite, and if she jabbars in a manner quite unintelligible she becomes irresistible.

"You cannot imagine how pretty it is to hear a sweet, red mouth say: '*J'aime beaucoup la gigotte*' (I like mutton so much)!

"My little English Kate spoke a most unlikely tongue. I could understand nothing of it in the first days; she invented so many unheard-of words. That was when I became absolutely in love with the comical, gay little monkey. All these crippled, strange, ridiculous terms took on a delicious charm upon her lips, and on the casino terrace in the

evening, we had many long conversations, resembling spoken enigmas.

"I married her! I loved her foolishly, as one can love a dream. For the true lover adores nought but a dream which takes the shape of a woman. You recall Louis Bouilhet's admirable verse:

*"You only were, in those rarest days,
A common instrument under my art;
Like the bow, on the viol d'amour it plays,
I dreamed my dream o'er your empty heart."*

"Well, my dear, the greatest mistake I made was to give my wife a teacher of French. As long as she made a martyr of the dictionary and punished the grammar, I was fond of her. Our talks were very simple. She showed a surprising grace of mind, an incomparable elegance in her actions. She seemed to be a marvelous speaking jewel, a doll of flesh made to kiss, knowing how to make known or at least indicate the things she desired, uttering at times the strangest exclamations and expressing rather complicated sensations and emotions in a coquettish fashion, with a force as incomprehensible as it was unforeseen. She much resembled those pretty playthings which say 'papa' and 'mamma,' pronouncing them 'baba' and 'bamban.'

"Could I have believed that—

"She speaks now—she speaks—badly—very badly. She makes just as many mistakes, but I can understand her. Yes, I understand—I know—and I know her.

"I have opened my doll to see what was inside. I have seen. And one must talk, my dear!

"Ah! You don't know, you could never imagine the theories, the ideas, the opinions of a young Englishwoman, well brought up, in whom there is nothing to reproach, who repeats to me morning and evening all the phrases in the dictionary of conversation in use at the schools for young people.

"You have seen those favors for a cotillion, those pretty gilt-paper-covered execrable bonbons? I had one of them. I tore it open. I wished to taste what was inside and became so disgusted that now there is a rebellion in my feelings if I but see one of her compatriots.

"I have carried a parakeet to whom an old-time instructress had taught French. Do you understand?"

The port of Trouville now showed its wooden piers covered with people. I said:

"Where is your wife?"

He answered: "I have just taken her back to Etretat."

"And where are you going?"

"I? I am going to try and divert myself at Trouville."

Then after a silence he added: "You cannot imagine how irksome a wife can become sometimes."

MADAME PARISSE

I WAS SEATED on the mole of the little port of Obernon, near the hamlet of La Salis, watching Antibes in the setting sun. I have never seen anything so wonderfully beautiful. The little town, inclosed within its heavy fortifications of masonry (constructed by M. de Vauban), was situated in the middle of the Gulf of Nice. The great waves rolled in from afar to throw themselves at its feet, surrounding it with a garland of foam, and above the ramparts the houses could be seen, climbing one above another up to the two towers pointing to the sky like two horns on an ancient helmet and standing out against the milky whiteness of the Alps—an enormous, illimitable wall of snow that appeared to shut off the entire horizon. Between the white foam at the foot of the walls and the white snow on the border of the sky, the little city, sparkling and upright on the blue background of the nearest mountain, shone in the rays of the setting sun, looking like a pyramid of red-roofed houses, the façades of which were white, yet of such different shades of white that they seemed to be of many hues.

The sky above the Alps was of a pale blue that was almost white, as if the snow had given to it some of its own whiteness. A few silvery clouds floated near the pale summit, and on the other side of the gulf Nice lay on the edge of the water like a white ribbon between the sea and the mountains. Two great lateen sails, forced onward by a strong breeze, appeared to run before the waves. I gazed at the scene, enchanted with its beauty. It was one of those sights so charming, so rare, so exquisite, which seem to take possession of you and become one of those moments never to be forgotten, like certain happy memories. We think, we enjoy, we suffer, we are moved, from various causes, but we love by seeing! He that can feel deep emotion through the power of sight experiences the same keen joy, refined and profound, felt by the man with a sensitive and nervous ear when listening to music that stirs the heart.

I said to my companion, M. Martini, a pure-blooded southerner, "That is certainly one of the rarest spectacles that it ever has been my good fortune to admire. I have seen Mont-Saint-Michel, that enormous jewel of granite, spring forth from the sands at sunrise. I have seen in the Sahara Lake Raianecherqui, fifty kilometers in length, shine

under a moon as brilliant as our sun and exhale toward the clouds a vapor as white as milk. I have seen in the Lipari Islands the fantastic sulphur crater of Volcanello, a giant flower, the center of which is a volcano that smokes and burns with a limitless yellow flame that spreads out over the ocean. But I have seen nothing more impressive than Antibes, standing before the Alps in the setting sun. And I cannot tell why, at this moment, souvenirs of olden days haunt me. Verses of Homer come into my mind. It is a city of the old Orient, Antibes; it is a city of the *Odyssey*, it is a western Troy—even though Troy was far from the sea."

M. Martini drew from his pocket a Sarty guide and read:

"The city was originally a colony founded by the Phoenicians of Marseilles about the year 340 B.C. It received from them the Greek name of Antipolis, that is to say, "city over against," "city in front of another," because, in reality, it was situated opposite Nice, another colony of Marseilles. After the conquest of the Gauls, the Romans made of Antibes a municipal city, and her inhabitants enjoyed the privileges of a Roman city.

"We know," he continued, "by an epigram of Martial, that in his time——"

I interrupted him, saying: "I don't care what it was! I tell you I have before my eyes a city of the *Odyssey*. Coast of Asia or coast of Europe—they are alike, and there is nothing on the other shore of the Mediterranean that awakens in me the memory of heroic days as does this."

The sound of an approaching step caused me to turn my head; a tall, dark woman was passing along the road that follows the sea in the direction of the cape.

M. Martini murmured, emphasizing the last words: "It is Madame Parisse—you know!"

No, I did not know, but this name thrown out, the name of the shepherd of Troy, confirmed me in my dream.

I said, however, "Who is this Madame Parisse?"

He appeared surprised that I did not know her story. I reaffirmed that I did not know it, and I looked at the woman, who went on without seeing us, dreaming, walking with a slow, stately step, like the dames of antiquity, without doubt. She was about thirty-five years old and beautiful yet, very beautiful, though perhaps a trifle too plump.

After she had passed out of sight M. Martini told me this story.

"Madame Parisse, a Mademoiselle Combelombe, had married, a year before the war of 1870, Monsieur Parisse, an employee of the government. She was then a beautiful young girl, as slender and gay as she has since become stout and sad. She had accepted Monsieur Parisse reluctantly; he was one of those little red-tape men with short

legs, who make a great fuss in a pint measure, which is yet too large for them.

"After the war Antibes was occupied by a single battalion of line commanded by Monsieur Jean de Carmelin, a young officer who had been decorated during the campaign and had only recently received the four stripes. As he was greatly bored with the life in that fortress, in that suffocating molehill shut in by enormous double walls, the commander went quite often for a walk on the cape, a sort of park or forest, where there was a fine, fresh breeze.

"There he met Madame Parisse, who used also to come on summer evenings to breathe the fresh air under the trees. How was it that they loved? Can one tell? They met; they looked at each other, and when they could not meet they thought of each other, without doubt. The image of the young woman with the brown eyes, black hair and pale face, the image of that fresh and beautiful southern girl, who showed her pretty white teeth in smiling, remained floating before the eyes of the officer, who would continue his promenade, lost in thought, biting his cigar instead of smoking it. And the image of the commander in his close-fitting coat and red trousers, covered with gold lace, whose blond mustache curled on his lip, must have remained before the eyes of Madame Parisse when her husband, unshaved, badly dressed, short of limb and with puffy stomach, returned home for supper.

"From meeting so often, they smiled at seeing each other, perhaps, and from that they came to think they knew each other. He bowed to her, certainly. She was surprised and inclined her head slightly, only just enough to escape being impolite. But at the end of two weeks she returned his salutations from afar before coming face to face.

"He talked to her! Of what? Of the setting sun, without any doubt! And they admired it together, looking deep into each other's eyes more often than at the horizon. And every day during two weeks there was some simple pretext for a little chat of several minutes. Then they dared to take a few steps together in talking of something or other, but their eyes spoke of a thousand things more intimate, of secret and charming things, the reflection of which in the softness and emotion of a look causes the heart to beat, because they reveal the soul better than words. Then he must have taken her hand and murmured those words which a woman divines without appearing to have heard them.

"It was admitted between them that they loved, without submitting their mutual knowledge to the proof of sensuality or passion. She would have been content to remain indefinitely at the stage of romantic tenderness, but not he—he wished to go further. And he pressed her, every day more ardently, to give herself entirely to him. She resisted, did not wish it and even seemed resolved never to yield.

"One evening, however, she said to him, as if by chance: 'My husband has just gone to Marseilles and is going to remain there four days.'

"Jean de Carmelin threw himself at her feet, begging her to open her door that very evening near eleven o'clock. But she would not listen to him and returned home as if angry. The commandant was in a bad humor all the evening, and the next day, beginning at day-break, he walked on the ramparts in a rage, going from the drum school to the platoon school and meting out reprimands to officers and men like one throwing stones into a crowd. But on returning for breakfast, he found under his napkin a note containing these four words: 'This evening, ten o'clock.' And he gave five francs, without any apparent reason, to the boy who served him.

"The day seemed long. He passed a part of it in prinking and perfuming himself. At the moment when he placed himself at the table for dinner another envelope was handed to him. He found inside this telegram:

"My darling, business terminated. I return this evening: train at nine.

"PARISSE.

"The commandant gave vent to an oath so violent that the boy let the soup tureen fall on the floor. What should he do? Certainly he wanted her, and that very night, too, let it cost what it might, and he would have her. He would have her by some means or another, if he had to arrest and imprison her husband. Suddenly an insane idea crossed his mind. He called for paper and wrote:

"MADAME: He will not return this evening. I swear it to you, and I will be at ten o'clock at the place you know. Fear nothing, I guarantee everything on my honor as an officer.

"JEAN DE CARMELIN.

"And, having sent this letter, he dined tranquilly. About eight o'clock he summoned Captain Gribois, who was next in command, and said to him, while rolling between his fingers the crumpled dispatch of Monsieur Parisse: 'Captain, I have received a telegram of singular character, which it is impossible for me to communicate to you. You must go immediately and guard the gates of the city in such a way that no one—you understand, no one—either comes in or goes out before six o'clock tomorrow morning. You must place guards in the streets also and compel the inhabitants to go into their houses at nine o'clock. Anyone who is found outside after that hour will be conducted to his domicile *manu militari*. If your men meet me during the night they

must retire at once with an air of not recognizing me. Do you understand me thoroughly?"

"Yes, Commandant."

"I make you responsible for the execution of these orders, Captain."

"Yes, Commandant."

"Would you like a glass of chartreuse?"

"With pleasure, Commandant."

"They touched glasses, drank the yellow liquor, and Captain Gribois departed.

"The train from Marseilles came into the station at exactly nine o'clock and left on the platform two travelers, then went on its way toward Nice.

"One of the travelers was tall and thin. He was a Monsieur Saribe, merchant in oils. The other passenger was short and stout—it was Monsieur Parisse. They started on their way together, their traveling bags in their hands, to reach the town, a kilometer distant. But on arriving at the gate the sentinels crossed their bayonets and ordered them off.

"Alarmed, amazed and filled with astonishment, they drew aside and deliberated; then, after taking counsel together, they returned with precaution to parley and to make known their names. But the soldiers must have received peremptory orders, for they threatened to shoot, and the two travelers, greatly frightened, took flight at the top of their speed, leaving behind them their bags which impeded their flight.

"The two unfortunate travelers made the circle of the ramparts and presented themselves at the Porte de Cannes. This also was closed and guarded as well by a menacing sentinel. Messieurs Saribe and Parisse, like prudent men, insisted no longer but returned to the station to find a shelter, for the road around the fortifications was not very safe after sunset.

"The employee at the station, surprised and sleepy, gave them permission to remain until daylight in the waiting room. They sat there without light, side by side on the green velvet-covered bench, too frightened to think of sleeping. The night was long for them.

"Toward half-past six they learned that the gates were open and that one could at last enter Antibes. They started for the town but did not find their bags along the way. When they had passed through the gates, still a little uneasy, the Commandant de Carmelin, with a sly look and his head in the air, came himself to meet and question them. He bowed to them politely and made excuses for having caused them to pass a bad night but said he had been obliged to execute orders.

"The people of Antibes were mystified. Some talked of a surprise

meditated by the Italians, others of the landing of the imperial prince, and still others imagined an Orléanist plot. The truth was not guessed until later, when they learned that the battalion of the commandant had been sent far away and that Monsieur de Carmelin had been severely punished."

M. Martini ceased speaking, and soon after Mme Parisse reappeared, her walk being finished. She passed sedately near me, her eyes on the Alps, the summits of which were ruddy with the last rays of the setting sun.

I desired to salute her, that poor, saddened woman who must think always of that one night of love, now so far in the past, and of the bold man who had dared, for a kiss from her, to put a whole city in a state of siege and compromise his future. Today he has probably forgotten her, unless sometimes, after drinking, he relates that audacious farce, so comic and so tender.

Had she ever seen him again? Did she love him still? And I thought: "Here, indeed, is a trait of modern love, grotesque and yet heroic. The Homer who will sing of this Helen and of the adventures of her Menelaus must have the soul of a *Merimée*. And yet the captain, this lover of that deserted woman, was valiant, bold, beautiful, strong as Achilles and more cunning than Ulysses."

MAKING A CONVERT

WHEN SABOT ENTERED the Martinville Inn they all laughed in advance. This rascal of a Sabot, how farcical he was! See how he disliked curates, for example! Ah yes, yes! He was ready to eat them, this merry fellow.

Sabot (Théodule), master carpenter, represented the progressive party at Martinville. He was a tall, thin man, with gay, cunning eyes, hair glued to his temples, and thin lips. When he said: "Our holy father, the priest," in a certain fashion, everybody was convulsed. He made it a point to work on Sunday during Mass. Every year he would kill his pig on Monday of Holy Week in order to have blood pudding until Easter, and when he passed the curate he would always say in a way of a joke:

"Here's a man who finds his good God upon the roof."

The priest, a large man, very tall also, dreaded him because of his talk, which made partisans. Father Maritime was a politic man, a friend of ease. The struggle between them had gone on for ten years, a secret struggle, provoking and incessant. Sabot was municipal coun-

selor. It was believed that he would be mayor, which would be decidedly bad for the church.

The elections were about to take place. The religious camp in Martinville trembled. Then one morning the curate set out for Rouen, announcing to his servant that he was going to see the archbishop.

Two days later he returned. He had a joyous, triumphant air. The next day everybody knew that the choir of the church was to be remodeled. A sum of six hundred francs had been given by Monsieur from his private cashbox.

All the old pine stalls were to be removed and be replaced by new ones of heart of oak. It was a considerable piece of carpenter work, and they were talking about it in every house that evening.

Théodule Sabot did not laugh. The next day when he went through the village his neighbors, friends and enemies said to him in a joking manner:

"Is it you who is to make over the choir of the church?"

He found nothing to answer, but he raged and raged silently. The rogues would add:

"It is a good job, not less than two or three hundred clear profit."

Two days later it was known that the repairs had been given to Célestin Chambrelan, the carpenter of Percheville. Then the news was contradicted; then it was said that all of the benches of the church were also to be renewed. This would be worth two thousand francs, as someone had found out from the administration. The excitement was great.

Théodule Sabot was not asleep. Never within the memory of man had a carpenter of the country executed a like piece of work. Then a rumor was heard that the curate was desolate at having to give his work to an out-of-town workman but that Sabot's opinions were so opposed to his that it was impossible to give it to him.

Sabot knew it. He betook himself to the priest's house at nightfall. The servant told him that the curate was in the church. He went there. Two Ladies of the Virgin, sourish old maids, were decorating the altar for the month of Mary under the direction of the priest. There he was, in the middle of the choir, swelling out his enormous front as he directed the work of the two women who, mounted on chairs, disposed of bouquets about the tabernacle.

Sabot felt under restraint in there, as if he were on the enemy's ground, but the desire of gain was ever pricking at his heart. He approached, cap in hand, without even noticing the Ladies of the Virgin, who remained standing, stupefied and immovable, upon the chairs. He stammered:

"Good evening, Monsieur Curate."

The priest responded without looking at him, all occupied with the altar:

"Good evening, Monsieur Carpenter."

Sabot, out of his element, could say nothing further. After a silence he said, however, "You are going to make some repairs?"

Father Maritime answered: "Yes, we are approaching the month of Mary."

Sabot repeated: "That's it, that's it," and then he was silent.

He felt now like withdrawing without saying anything more, but a glance of the eye around the choir restrained him. He perceived that there were sixteen stalls to be made, six to the right and eight to the left, the door of the sacristy occupying two places more. Sixteen stalls in oak would be worth three hundred francs, and in round numbers there ought to be two hundred francs' profit on the work if it was managed well. Then he stammered:

"I—I've come for the work."

The curate appeared surprised. He asked:

"What work?"

"The work of the repairs," murmured Sabot desperately.

Then the priest turned toward him and, looking him straight in the eye, said: "And you speak to me of working on the choir stalls of my church!"

The tone of Father Maritime's voice caused a cold chill to run down the back of Théodule Sabot and gave him a furious desire to scamper away. Nevertheless, he responded with humility:

"Why, yes, Monsieur Curate."

Then the priest folded his arms across his ample front and, as if powerless from surprise, replied:

"You—you—you—Sabot, come to ask that from me! You—the only impious soul in my parish! Why, it would be a scandal, a public scandal. The archbishop would reprimand me and send me to another place, perhaps."

He breathed hard for some seconds, then in a calmer tone he continued:

"I understand that it would be hard for you to see a work of so much importance go to a carpenter in a neighboring parish. But I could not do otherwise, at least not unless—no—it is impossible. You would never consent—and without that—never."

Sabot regarded critically the line of benches that came almost up to the door of the sacristy. Christopher! If one might be able to make this alteration! And he asked: "What is it you consider necessary? Say it."

The priest, in a firm tone, replied: "It would be necessary for me to have a statement of your good will."

Sabot murmured: "I should say nothing. I should say nothing—that would be understood."

The curate declared: "It would be necessary to take public communion at High Mass next Sunday."

The carpenter grew pale and without answering asked:

"And the church benches, are they going to be replaced with new ones too?"

The priest responded with assurance: "Yes, but that will come later."

Sabot repeated: "I would say nothing; I say nothing. In fact, I feel nothing derogatory to religion, and I believe in it, certainly; what ruffles me is the practice of it, but in this case, I should not show myself contrary."

The Ladies of the Virgin, having got down from their chairs, concealed themselves behind the altar; they were listening, pale with emotion.

The curate, seeing himself victorious, suddenly became friendly and familiar: "Well and good! Well and good!" he said. "You have spoken wisely instead of being foolish, you understand. We shall see. We shall see."

Sabot smiled in a constrained way as he asked: "Isn't there some way of giving this communion the slip?"

The priest, with severe countenance, replied:

"At the moment that this work is given to you I wish to be certain of your conversion." Then he continued more gently: "You will come to confess tomorrow, for it will be necessary for me to examine you at least twice."

Sabot repeated: "At least twice?"

"Yes."

The priest smiled. "You understand that it will be necessary to have a general clearing out, a complete cleansing. I shall expect you then tomorrow."

The carpenter, much moved, asked: "Where do you do this?"

"Why, in the confessional."

"In—that box there—in the corner? That is—scarcely—big enough for me, your box."

"Why so?"

"Seeing that—seeing that I am not accustomed to it. And seeing that I'm a little hard of hearing."

The curate showed himself lenient. "Ah well, you can come to my house, in my dining room. There we shall be all alone, face to face. How will that suit you?"

"That's it. That suits me, but your box, no."

"Well, tomorrow then, after the day's work, at six o'clock."

"It is understood, all plain and agreed upon; till tomorrow then, Monsieur Curate, and the rack for him who retracts."

And he extended his great, rude hand into which the priest let fall his own heartily. The smack of this handshake ran along under the arches and died away back in the organ pipes.

Théodule Sabot was not tranquil while he was at work the next day. The apprehension he felt was something like what one feels when he is going to have a tooth pulled. Every moment this thought would come to him: "I must go to confession this evening." And his troubled soul, the soul of an atheist not wholly convinced, became excited from the confused and powerful fear of some divine mystery.

He directed his steps toward the rectory when he had finished his day's work. The curate was waiting for him in the garden, reading his breviary as he walked up and down a narrow path. He seemed radiant and said with a great laugh:

"Ah well, here you are! Come in, come in, Monsieur Sabot, nobody is going to eat you."

And Sabot passed in first. He stammered:

"If you are not too busy I should be pleased to finish up our little business right away."

The curate answered: "At your service. I will get my surplice. One minute and I will listen to you."

The carpenter, so disturbed that he no longer had two ideas, watched him cover himself with the white garment with its pressed folds. The priest made a sign to him.

"Put your knees on this cushion."

Sabot remained standing, ashamed to have to kneel. He muttered: "What's the use?"

But the priest became majestic. "One can only approach the tribunal of penitence on the knees."

And Sabot kneeled.

The priest said: "Recite the Confiteor."

Sabot asked: "What's that?"

"The Confiteor. If you do not know it repeat one by one, after me, the words I pronounce."

And the curate articulated the sacred prayer in a deliberate voice, scanning the words for the carpenter to repeat; then he said:

"Now, confess."

But Sabot said nothing more, not knowing how to commence.

Then Father Maritime came to his aid.

"My child, I will ask you some questions until you become a little

more familiar with the customs. We will take up, one by one, the commandments of God. Listen to me and be not troubled. Speak very frankly, and never fear to say too much.

*"One God alone you shall adore
And you shall love him perfectly."*

Have you ever loved someone or something more than God? Do you love Him with all your soul, with all your heart and all the energy of your love?"

Sabot was sweating from the effort of his thought. Finally he said: "No. Oh no, Monsieur Curate. I love the good God as much as I can. That is—yes—I love Him well. To say that I love Him better than my children, no, I cannot. To say that if it was necessary to choose between Him and my children I would choose the good God, that I could not. To say that I would be willing to lose a hundred francs for the love of the good God, no, I could not. But I love Him well, be sure; I love Him well, all the same."

The priest, very grave, declared: "It is necessary that you love Him before anything."

And Sabot, full of good will, answered: "I will do my best, Monsieur Curate."

Father Maritime continued: "God will not have you take His name in vain. Have you sometimes made use of an oath?"

"No. Oh no, indeed! I never swear. Sometimes in a moment of anger I speak the sacred name of God. That's all. I do not swear."

The priest cried: "But that is swearing." And then gravely: "Do it no more. I will continue. You will remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. What do you do on Sunday?"

This time Sabot scratched his ear. Finally he said: "I serve the good God in my own way, Monsieur Curate. I serve Him—at home. I work on Sunday."

The curate was magnanimous in interrupting him. "I know you will be more proper in the future. I pass the Commandments following, sure that you have not failed in the first two. Let us see the sixth and the ninth. I repeat: 'The goods of another thou shalt not take, nor retain them knowingly.' Have you turned to your own use by any means the goods belonging to another?"

Théodule Sabot answered indignantly: "No! Ah no! I am an honest man, Monsieur Curate. I swear to that. Not to say that I have not sometimes counted more hours of work than I have done—I have sometimes done that. And I could not say that I have not put a few more centimes on notes, only a few sometimes. But as for robbing, no, no, indeed, no!"

The curate answered severely: "Take not a single centime, for that is robbery. Do it no more. 'False witness shalt thou not bear, nor lie about anything.' Have you lied?"

"No, not that. I am no liar. I am not that kind. If you ask if I have not told some stories for the sake of talking, I could not deny it. And to say that I have not made people believe what was not so, when it was for my interest to do so, I could not. But as for lies, I tell no lies."

The priest simply said: "Be a little more careful." Then he pronounced:

"Things of the flesh thou shalt not desire, except in marriage alone."

"Have you desired or possessed another woman than your own?"

Sabot exclaimed with sincerity: "Oh no! As for that, no, Monsieur Curate. Deceive my poor wife? No! no! Not as much as the end of your finger. Not in thought, say nothing of action! That's true."

He was very silent for some seconds, then, very low, as if some doubt had come over him, he said: "When I go to town, to say that I never go into a house, you know, one of the houses of license, for the sake of a bit of laughter and frolic and see another kind of skin, that I could not say—but I always pay, Monsieur Curate, I always pay, but I won't embarrass you with this that you have neither seen nor known."

The curate did not insist but gave the absolution.

Théodule Sabot executed the work of the choir stalls and received the sacrament in the months following.

A LITTLE WALK

WHEN FATHER LERAS, bookkeeper with Messrs Labuze and Company, went out of the store, he stood for some minutes, dazzled by the brilliancy of the setting sun.

He had toiled all day under the yellow light of the gas jet at the end of the rear shop, on the court which was as narrow and deep as a well. The little room in which for forty years he had spent his days was so dark that even in the middle of summer they could hardly dispense with the gas from eleven to three o'clock.

It was always cold and damp there, and the emanations from that sort of hole on which the window looked came into the gloomy room, filling it with an odor moldy and sewerlike.

M. Leras for forty years arrived at eight o'clock in the morning at

his prison, and he remained till seven at night, bent over his books, writing with the faithfulness of a good employee.

He now earned three thousand francs per year, having begun with fifteen hundred francs. He had remained unmarried, his means not permitting him to take a wife. And never having enjoyed anything, he did not desire much. From time to time, nevertheless, weary of his monotonous and continuous work, he made a platonic vow:

"Cristi, if I had five thousand livres' income I would enjoy life!"

He had never enjoyed life, never having had more than his monthly salary.

His existence passed without events, without emotion and almost without hopes. The faculty of dreaming, which everyone has in him, had never developed in the mediocrity of his ambitions.

He had entered the employ of Messrs Labuze and Company at twenty-one years of age. And he had never left it.

In 1856 he had lost his father, then his mother in 1859. And since then he had experienced nothing but a removal, his landlord having wanted to raise his rent.

Every day his morning alarm, exactly at six o'clock, made him jump out of bed by its fearful racket.

Twice, however, this machine had run down, in 1866 and in 1874, without his ever knowing why.

He dressed, made his bed, swept his room, dusted his armchair and the top of his commode. All these duties required an hour and a half.

Then he went out, bought a roll at the Lahure bakery, which had had a dozen different proprietors without losing its name, and he set out for the office, eating the bread on the way.

His whole existence was thus accomplished in the narrow dark office which was adorned with the same wallpaper. He had entered the employ young, an assistant to M. Burment and with the desire of taking his place.

He had taken his place and expected nothing further.

All that harvest of memories which other men make during their lives, the unforeseen events, the sweet or tragic love affairs, the adventurous journeys, all the hazards of a free existence, had been strange to him.

The days, the weeks, the months, the seasons, the years, were all alike. At the same hour every day he rose, left the house, arrived at the office, took his luncheon, went away, dined and retired without ever having interrupted the monotony of the same acts, the same deeds and the same thoughts.

Formerly he looked at his blond mustache and curly hair in the little round glass left by his predecessor. He now looked every morning,

before going out, at his white mustache and his bald head in the same glass. Forty years had flown, long and rapid, empty as a day of sorrow and like the long hours of a bad night—forty years, of which nothing remained, not even a memory, not even a misfortune, since the death of his parents, nothing.

That day M. Leras stood dazzled at the street door by the brilliancy of the setting sun, and instead of returning to his house he had the idea of taking a little walk before dinner, something which he did four or five times a year.

He reached the boulevard, where many people were passing under the budding trees. It was an evening in springtime, one of those first soft, warm evenings which stir the heart with the intoxication of life.

M. Leras walked along with his mincing old man's step, with a gaiety in his eye, happy with the unusual joy and the mildness of the air.

He reached the Champs Elysées and proceeded, reanimated by the odors of youth which filled the breeze.

The whole sky glowed, and the Triumphal Arch stood with its dark mass against the shining horizon, like a giant struggling in a conflagration. When he had nearly reached the stupendous monument the old bookkeeper felt hungry and went into a wineshop to dine.

They served him in front of the shop, on the sidewalk, a sheep's-foot stew, a salad and some asparagus, and M. Leras made the best dinner he had made in a long while. He washed down his Brie cheese with a small bottle of good Bordeaux; he drank a cup of coffee, which seldom occurred to him, and finally a tiny glass of brandy.

When he had paid he felt quite lively and brisk, even a little perturbed. He said: "I will continue my walk as far as the entrance to the Bois de Boulogne. It will do me good."

He started. An old air which one of his neighbors used to sing long ago came to his mind:

*When the park grows green and gay
Then doth my brave lover say,
"Come with me, my sweet and fair,
To get a breath of air."*

He hummed it continually, beginning it over again and again. Night had fallen upon Paris, a night without wind, a night of sweet calm. M. Leras followed the Avenue de Bois de Boulogne and watched the cabs pass. They came with their bright lamps, one after another, giving a fleeting glimpse of a couple embracing, the woman in light-colored dress and the man clad in black.

It was a long procession of lovers, driving under the starry and

sultry sky. They kept arriving continually. They passed, reclining in the carriages, silent, pressed to one another, lost in the hallucination, the emotion of desire, in the excitement of the approaching culmination. The warm darkness seemed full of floating kisses. A sensation of tenderness made the air languishing and stifling. All these embracing people, all these persons intoxicated with the same intention, the same thought, caused a fever around them. All these carriages full of caresses diffused as they passed, as it were, a subtle and disturbing emanation.

M. Leras, a little wearied finally by walking, took a seat on a bench to watch these carriages loaded with love. And almost immediately a woman came near to him and took her place at his side.

"Good evening, my little man," she said.

He did not reply. She continued:

"Don't you want a sweetheart?"

"You are mistaken, madame."

And she took his arm.

"Come, don't be a fool; listen——"

He had risen and gone away, his heart oppressed.

A hundred steps farther on another woman approached him.

"Won't you sit down a moment with me, my fine boy?"

He said to her:

"Why do you lead such a life?"

"Name of God, it isn't always for my pleasure."

He continued in a soft voice:

"Then what compels you?"

She: "Must live, you know." And she went away, singing.

M. Leras stood, astonished. Other women passed near him, similarly accosting him. It seemed to him that something dark was setting upon his head, something heartbreaking. And he seated himself again upon a bench. The carriages kept hurrying by.

"Better not to have come here," he thought. "I am all unsettled."

He began to think on all this love, venal or passionate, on all these kisses, bought or free, which streamed before him.

Love, he hardly knew what it meant. He never had had more than two or three sweethearts in all his life, his means not permitting. And he thought of that life which he had led, so different from the life of all, his life so dark, so dull, so flat, so empty.

There are beings who truly never have any luck. And all at once, as if a thick veil had been lifted, he perceived the misery, the infinite, monotonous misery of his existence: the past misery, the present misery, the future misery, the last days like the first, with nothing before him, nothing behind him, nothing around him, nothing in his heart, nothing anywhere.

The carriages kept passing. He saw appearing and disappearing in the rapid flight of the open *fiacre* the two beings, silent and embracing. It seemed to him that the whole of humanity was filing before him, intoxicated with joy, with pleasure, with happiness. And he was alone looking on at it, all alone. He would be still alone tomorrow, alone always, alone as no one else is alone.

He rose, took a few steps, and suddenly fatigued, as if he had walked for many miles, he sat down on the next bench.

What was awaiting him? What did he hope for? Nothing. He thought how good it must be when a man is old to find, on getting home, little prattling children there. To grow old is sweet when a person is surrounded by those beings who owe him their life, who love him, who caress him, saying those charming, foolish words which warm the heart and console him for everything.

And thinking of his empty room, neat and sad, where never a person entered but himself, a feeling of distress overwhelmed his soul. It seemed to him that room was more lamentable even than his little office.

No one came to it; no one spoke in it. It was dead, silent, without the echo of a human voice. One would say that the walls had something of the people who lived within, something of their look, their face, their words.

The houses inhabited by happy families are more gay than the habitations of the wretched. His room was empty of memories, like his life, and the thought of going back into that room all alone, of sleeping in his bed, of doing over again all his actions and all his duties of evening terrified him. And as if to put himself farther away from this gloomy lodging and from the moment when he would have to return to it, he rose and, finding all at once the first pathway of the park, he entered a clump of woods to sit upon the grass.

He heard round about him, above him, everywhere, a confused sound, immense and continuous, made of innumerable different voices, near and far, a vague and enormous palpitation of life—the breath of Paris respiring like some colossal being.

The sun already high cast a flood of light upon the Bois de Boulogne. Some carriages began to circulate, and the horseback riders gaily arrived.

A couple were going at a walk through a lonely bridle path.

Suddenly the young woman, raising her eyes, perceived something brown among the bushes; she raised her hand, astonished and disturbed.

"Look—what is that?"

Then uttering a scream, she let herself fall into the arms of her companion, who placed her on the ground.

The guards, quickly summoned, unfastened an old man hanging to a branch by his braces.

It was agreed that the deceased had hanged himself the evening before.

The papers found upon him disclosed the fact that he was the book-keeper for Messrs Labuze and Company and that his name was Leras.

They attributed his death to suicide, for which the cause could not be determined. Perhaps a sudden attack of madness.

A WIFE'S CONFESSION

MY FRIEND, you have asked me to relate to you the liveliest recollections of my life. I am very old, without relatives, without children, so I am free to make a confession to you. Promise me one thing—never to reveal my name.

I have been much loved, as you know; I have often myself loved. I was very beautiful; I may say this today, when my beauty is gone. Love was for me the life of the soul, just as the air is the life of the body. I would have preferred to die rather than exist without affection, without having somebody always to care for me. Women often pretend to love only once with all the strength of their hearts; it has often happened to be so violent in one of my attachments that I thought it would be impossible for my transports ever to end. However, they always died out in a natural fashion, like a fire when it has no more fuel.

I will tell you today the first of my adventures, in which I was very innocent but which led to the others. The horrible vengeance of that dreadful chemist of Pecq recalls to me the shocking drama of which I was, in spite of myself, a spectator.

I had been a year married to a rich man, Comte Hervé de Ker—a Breton of ancient family, whom I did not love, you understand. True love needs, I believe, at any rate, freedom and impediments at the same time. The love which is imposed, sanctioned by law and blessed by the priest—can we really call that love? A legal kiss is never as good as a stolen kiss. My husband was tall in stature, elegant, and a really fine gentleman in his manners. But he lacked intelligence. He spoke in a downright fashion and uttered opinions that cut like the blade of a knife. He created the impression that his mind was full of ready-made views instilled into him by his father and mother, who had themselves

got them from their ancestors. He never hesitated, but on every subject immediately made narrow-minded suggestions without showing any embarrassment and without realizing that there might be other ways of looking at things. One felt that his head was closed up, that no ideas circulated in it, none of those ideas which renew a man's mind and make it sound, like a breath of fresh air passing through an open window into a house.

The château in which we lived was situated in the midst of a desolate tract of country. It was a large, melancholy structure, surrounded by enormous trees, with tufts of moss on it, resembling old men's white beards. The park, a real forest, was inclosed in a deep trench called the ha-ha, and at its extremity, near the moorland, we had big ponds full of reeds and floating grass. Between the two, at the edge of a stream which connected them, my husband had got a little hut built for shooting wild ducks.

We had, in addition to our ordinary servants, a keeper, a sort of brute, devoted to my husband to the death, and a chambermaid, almost a friend, passionately attached to me. I had brought her back from Spain with me five years before. She was a deserted child. She might have been taken for a gypsy with her dusky skin, her dark eyes, her hair thick as a wood and always clustering around her forehead. She was at the time sixteen years old, but she looked twenty.

The autumn was beginning. We hunted much, sometimes on neighboring estates, sometimes on our own, and I noticed a young man, the Baron de C——, whose visits at the château became singularly frequent. Then he ceased to come; I thought no more about it, but I perceived that my husband changed in his demeanor toward me.

He seemed taciturn and preoccupied; he did not kiss me, and in spite of the fact that he did not come into my room, as I insisted on separate apartments in order to live a little alone, I often at night heard a furtive step drawing near my door and withdrawing a few minutes after.

As my window was on the ground floor, I thought I had also often heard someone prowling in the shadow around the château. I told my husband about it, and, having looked at me intensely for some seconds, he answered:

"It is nothing—it is the keeper."

Now one evening, just after dinner, Hervé, who appeared to be extraordinarily gay, with a sly sort of gaiety, said to me:

"Would you like to spend three hours out with the guns, in order to shoot a fox who comes every evening to eat my hens?"

I was surprised. I hesitated, but as he kept staring at me with singular persistency, I ended by replying:

"Why, certainly, my friend." I must tell you that I hunted like a man the wolf and the wild boar. So it was quite natural that he should suggest this shooting expedition to me.

But my husband, all of a sudden, had a curiously nervous look, and all the evening he seemed agitated, rising up and sitting down feverishly.

About ten o'clock he suddenly said to me:

"Are you ready?"

I rose, and as he was bringing me my gun himself, I asked:

"Are we to load with bullets or with deer shot?"

He showed some astonishment; then he rejoined:

"Oh, only with deer shot; make your mind easy! That will be enough."

Then after some seconds he added in a peculiar tone:

"You may boast of having splendid coolness."

I burst out laughing.

"If? Why, pray? Coolness because I go to kill a fox? What are you thinking of, my friend?"

And we quietly made our way across the park. All the household slept. The full moon seemed to give a yellow tint to the old gloomy building, whose slate roof glittered brightly. The two turrets that flanked it had two plates of light on their summits, and no noise disturbed the silence of this clear, sad night, sweet and still, which seemed in a death trance. Not a breath of air, not a shriek from a toad, not a hoot from an owl; a melancholy numbness lay heavy on everything. When we were under the trees in the park a sense of freshness stole over me, together with the odor of fallen leaves. My husband said nothing, but he was listening; he was watching; he seemed to be smelling about in the shadows, possessed from head to foot by the passion for the chase.

We soon reached the edges of the ponds.

Their tufts of rushes remained motionless; not a breath of air caressed them, but movements which were scarcely perceptible ran through the water. Sometimes the surface was stirred by something, and light circles gathered around, like luminous wrinkles enlarging indefinitely.

When we reached the hut, where we were to lie in wait, my husband made me go in first; then he slowly loaded his gun, and the dry crackling of the powder produced a strange effect on me. He saw that I was shuddering and asked:

"Does this trial happen to be quite enough for you? If so, go back."

I was much surprised and I replied:

"Not at all. I did not come to go back without doing anything. You seem queer this evening."

He murmured:

"As you wish." And we remained there without moving.

At the end of about half an hour, as nothing broke the oppressive stillness of this bright autumn night, I said in a low tone:

"Are you quite sure he is passing this way?"

Hervé winced as if I had bitten him, and with his mouth close to my ear he said:

"Make no mistake about it! I am quite sure."

And once more there was silence.

I believe I was beginning to get drowsy when my husband pressed my arm, and his voice, changed to a hiss, said:

"Do you see him there under the trees?"

I looked in vain; I could distinguish nothing. And slowly Hervé now cocked his gun, all the time fixing his eyes on my face.

I was myself making ready to fire, and suddenly, thirty paces in front of us, appeared in the full light of the moon a man who was hurrying forward with rapid movements, his body bent, as if he were trying to escape.

I was so stupefied that I uttered a loud cry, but before I could turn round there was a flash before my eyes; I heard a deafening report, and I saw the man rolling on the ground, like a wolf hit by a bullet.

I burst into dreadful shrieks, terrified, almost going mad; then a furious hand—it was Hervé's—seized me by the throat. I was flung down on the ground then carried off by his strong arms. He ran, holding me up, till he reached the body lying on the grass, and he threw me on top of it violently, as if he wanted to break my head.

I thought I was lost; he was going to kill me, and he had just raised his heel up to my forehead when, in his turn, he was gripped, knocked down, before I could yet realize what had happened.

I rose up abruptly and I saw kneeling on top of him Porquita, my maid, clinging like a wildcat to him with desperate energy, tearing off his beard, his mustache and the skin of his face.

Then as if another idea had suddenly taken hold of her mind, she rose up and, flinging herself on the corpse, she threw her arms around the dead man, kissing his eyes and his mouth, opening the dead lips with her own lips, trying to find in them a breath and the long, long kiss of lovers.

My husband, picking himself up, gazed at me. He understood and, falling at my feet, said:

"Oh, forgive me, my darling. I suspected you, and I killed this girl's lover. It was my keeper that deceived me."

But I was watching the strange kisses of that dead man and that living woman, and her sobs and her writhings of sorrowing love, and at that moment I understood that I might be unfaithful to my husband.

A DEAD WOMAN'S SECRET

SHE HAD DIED painlessly, tranquilly, like a woman whose life was irreproachable, and she now lay on her back in bed, with closed eyes, calm features, her long white hair carefully arranged, as if she had again made her toilet ten minutes before her death. Her pale physiognomy was so composed now that she had passed away, so resigned, that one felt sure a sweet soul had dwelt in that body, that this serene grandmother had spent an untroubled existence, that this virtuous woman had ended her life without any shock, without any remorse.

On his knees beside the bed, her son, a magistrate of inflexible principles, and her daughter Marguerite—in religion, Sister Eulalie—were weeping distractedly. She had from the time of their infancy armed them with an inflexible code of morality, teaching them a religion without weakness and a sense of duty without any compromise. He, the son, had become a magistrate and, wielding the weapon of the law, struck down without pity the feeble and the erring. She, the daughter, quite penetrated with the virtue that had bathed her in this austere family, had become the spouse of God through disgust with men.

They had scarcely known their father; all they knew was that he had made their mother unhappy without learning any further details. The nun passionately kissed one hand of her dead mother, which hung down, a hand of ivory like that of Christ in the large crucifix which lay on the bed. At the opposite side of the prostrate body the other hand seemed still to grasp the rumpled sheet with that wondering movement which is called the fold of the dying, and the lines had retained little creases as a memento of those last motions which precede the eternal motionlessness. A few light taps at the door caused the two sobbing heads to look up, and the priest, who had just dined, entered the apartment. He was flushed, a little puffed from the effects of the process of digestion which had just commenced, for he had put a good dash of brandy into his coffee in order to counteract the fatigue caused by the last nights he had remained up and that which he anticipated from the night that was still in store for him. He had put on a look of sadness, that simulated sadness of the priest to whom

death is a means of livelihood. He made the sign of the cross and, coming over to them with his professional gestures, said:

"Well, my poor children, I have come to help you to pass these mournful hours."

But Sister Eulalie suddenly rose up.

"Thanks, Father, but my brother and I would like to be left alone with her. These are the last moments that we now have for seeing her, so we want to feel ourselves once more, the three of us, just as we were years ago when we—we—we were only children and our poor—poor mother——" She was unable to finish with the flood of tears that gushed from her eyes and the sobs that were choking her.

But the priest bowed with a more serene look on his face, for he was thinking of his bed. "Just as you please, my children."

Then he kneeled down, again crossed himself, prayed, rose and softly stole away, murmuring as he went: "She was a saint."

They were left alone, the dead woman and her children. A hidden timepiece kept regularly ticking in its dark corner, and through the open window the soft odors of hay and of woods penetrated with faint gleams of moonlight. No sound in the fields outside, save the wandering croak of toads and now and then the humming of some nocturnal insect darting in like a ball and knocking itself against the wall.

An infinite peace, a divine melancholy, a silent serenity, surrounded this dead woman, seemed to emanate from her, to evaporate from her into the atmosphere outside and to calm Nature herself.

Then the magistrate, still on his knees, his head pressed against the bedclothes, in a far-off, heartbroken voice that pierced through the sheets and the coverlet, exclaimed:

"Mamma, Mamma, Mamma!" And the sister, sinking down on the floor, striking the wood with her forehead fanatically, twisting herself about and quivering like a person in an epileptic fit, groaned: "Jesus, Jesus—Mamma—Jesus!"

And both of them, shaken by a hurricane of grief, panted with a rattling in their throats.

Then the fit gradually subsided, and they now wept in a less violent fashion, like the rainy calm that follows a squall on a storm-beaten sea. Then after some time they rose and fixed their glances on the beloved corpse. And memories, those memories of the past, so sweet, so torturing today, came back to their minds with all those little forgotten details, those little details so intimate and familiar, which make the being who is no more live over again. They recalled circumstances, words, smiles, certain intonations of voice which belonged to one whom they should never hear speaking to them again. They saw her

once more happy and calm, and phrases she used in ordinary conversation rose to their lips. They even remembered a little movement of the hand, peculiar to her, as if she were keeping time when she was saying something of importance.

And they loved her as they had never before loved her. And by the depth of their despair they realized how strongly they had been attached to her and how desolate they would find themselves now.

She had been their mainstay, their guide, the best part of their youth, of that happy portion of their lives which had vanished; she had been the bond that united them to existence, the mother, the mamma, the creative flesh, the tie that bound them to their ancestors. They would henceforth be solitary, isolated; they would have nothing on earth to look back upon.

The nun said to her brother:

"You know how Mamma used always to read over her old letters. They are all there in her desk. Suppose we read them in our turn and so revive all her life this night by her side. It would be like a kind of road of the cross, like making the acquaintance of her mother, of grandparents whom we never knew, whose letters are there and of whom she has so often talked to us; you remember?"

And they drew forth from the drawer a dozen little packets of yellow paper, carefully tied up and placed close to one another. They flung these relics on the bed and, selecting one of them on which the word "Father" was written, they opened and read what was in it.

It consisted of those very old letters which are to be found in old family writing desks, those letters which have the flavor of another century. The first said, "My darling"; another, "My beautiful little girl"; then others, "My dear child"; and then again, "My dear daughter." And suddenly the nun began reading aloud, reading for the dead her own history, all her tender souvenirs. And the magistrate listened, while he leaned on the bed with his eyes on his mother's face. And the motionless corpse seemed happy.

Sister Eulalie, interrupting herself, said: "We ought to put them into the grave with her, to make a winding sheet of them and bury them with her."

And then she took up another packet on which the descriptive word did not appear.

And in a loud tone she began:

"My adored one, I love you to distraction. Since yesterday I have been suffering like a damned soul burned by the recollection of you. I feel your lips on mine, your eyes under my eyes, your

flesh under my flesh. I love you! I love you! You have made me mad! My arms open! I pant with an immense desire to possess you again. My whole body calls out to you, wants you. I have kept in my mouth the taste of your kisses."

The magistrate rose up; the nun stopped reading. He snatched the letter from her and sought for the signature. There was none, save under the words, "He who adores you," the name "Henry." Their father's name was René. So then he was not the man.

Then the son, with rapid fingers, fumbled in the packet of letters, took another of them and read:

"I can do without your caresses no longer."

And standing up with the severity of a judge passing sentence, he gazed at the impassive face of the dead woman.

The nun, straight as a statue, with teardrops standing at each corner of her eyes, looked at her brother, waiting to see what he meant to do. Then he crossed the room, slowly reached the window and looked out thoughtfully into the night.

When he turned back Sister Eulalie, her eyes quite dry, still remained standing near the bed with a downcast look.

He went over to the drawer and flung in the letters which he had picked up from the floor. Then he drew the curtain round the bed.

And when the dawn made the candles on the table look pale the son rose from his armchair and, without even a parting glance at the mother whom he had separated from them and condemned, he said slowly:

"Now, my sister, let us leave the room."

LOVE'S AWAKENING

NO ONE was surprised at the marriage of M. Simon Lebrument and Mlle Jeanne Cordier. M. Lebrument came to buy out the office of M. Papillon; he needed, it was understood, money with which to pay for it, and Mlle Jeanne Cordier had three hundred thousand francs clear in stocks and bonds.

M. Lebrument was a handsome bachelor, who had style, the style of a notary, a provincial style, but, after all, some style, which was a rare thing at Boutigny-le-Rebours.

Mlle Cordier had grace and freshness, grace a little awkward and

freshness a little fixed up, but she was, nevertheless, a pretty girl, desirable and entertaining.

The wedding ceremonies turned Boutigny topsy-turvy. The married couple was much admired when they returned to the conjugal domicile to conceal their happiness, having resolved to make a little simple journey to Paris after they had spent a few days together.

It was charming, these few days together, as M. Lebrument knew how to manage his early relations with his wife with a delicacy, a directness, and sense of fitness, that was remarkable. He took for his motto: "Everything comes to him who waits." He knew how to be patient and energetic at the same time. His success was rapid and complete.

At the end of four days Mme Lebrument adored her husband. She could not bear to be a moment away from him. He must be near her all day long that she might caress his hands, his beard, his nose, etc. She would sit upon his knees and, taking him by the ears, would say: "Open your mouth and shut your eyes." He opened his mouth with confidence, shut his eyes halfway and then would receive a very long, sweet kiss that made great shivers in his back. And in his turn, he never had enough caresses, enough lips, enough hands, enough of anything with which to enjoy his wife from morning until evening and from evening until morning.

As soon as the first week had slipped away he said to his young companion:

"If you wish, we might leave for Paris Tuesday of next week. We shall be like two lovers who are not married, go about to the theaters, the restaurants, the concert cafés and everywhere, everywhere."

She jumped for joy. "Oh yes, yes!" she replied. "Let us go as soon as possible."

"And as we must not forget anything, you might ask your father to have your dowry ready; I will take it with me and at the same time pay Monsieur Papillon."

She answered: "I will speak to him about it tomorrow morning."

Then he seized her in his arms and began again the little tender-nesses she loved so much and had reveled in now for eight days.

The Tuesday following, the father-in-law and the mother-in-law accompanied their daughter and son-in-law to the station, whence they set out for the capital. The father-in-law remarked:

"I tell you it is imprudent to carry so much money in your pocket-book." And the young notary smiled.

"Do not be disturbed, Father-in-law," he answered. "I am accustomed to these things. You know that in my profession it often happens that I have nearly a million about me. By carrying it with me, we

escape a lot of formalities and delays, to say the least. Do not give yourself any uneasiness."

Then the trainman cried out, "All aboard!" and they hurried into a compartment where they found themselves with two old ladies.

Lebrument murmured in his wife's ear: "How annoying! Now I cannot smoke."

She answered in a low tone: "I am sorry, too, but not on account of your cigar."

The engine puffed and started. The journey lasted an hour, during which they could not say anything of importance, because the two old ladies did not go to sleep.

When they were in the Saint-Lazare station in Paris M. Lebrument said to his wife:

"If you wish, my dear, we will first go and breakfast on the boulevard then return at our leisure to find our trunk and give it to the porter of some hotel."

She consented immediately. "Oh yes," she said, "let us breakfast in some restaurant. Is it far from here?"

"Yes, rather far, but we will take an omnibus."

She was astonished. "Why not a cab?" she asked.

He groaned as he said smilingly: "And you are economical! A cab for five minutes' ride at six sous per minute! You do not deprive yourself of anything!"

"That is true," she said, a little confused.

A large omnibus was passing, with three horses at a trot. Lebrument hailed it: "Conductor! Eh, conductor!"

The heavy carriage stopped. The young notary pushed his wife inside, saying hurriedly in a low voice:

"You get in while I climb up on the outside to smoke at least a cigarette before breakfast."

She had not time for any answer. The conductor, who had seized her by the arm to aid her in mounting the steps, pushed her into the bus, where she landed, half-frightened, upon a seat and in a sort of stupor watched the feet of her husband through the windows at the back as he climbed to the top of the imperial.

There she remained, immovable, between a large gentleman who smelled of a pipe and an old woman who smelled of a dog. All the other travelers, in two mute lines—a grocer's boy, a workman, a sergeant of infantry, a gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles and a silk cap with enormous visors, like gutters, and two ladies with an important, mincing air, which seemed to say: "We are here, although we should be in a better place." Then there were two good sisters, a little girl in long hair and an undertaker. The assemblage had the appear-

ance of a collection of caricatures in a freak museum, a series of expressions of the human countenance, like a row of grotesque puppets which one knocks down at a fair.

The jolts of the carriage made them toss their heads a little, and as they shook, the flesh of their cheeks trembled, and the disturbance of the rolling wheels gave them an idiotic or sleepy look.

The young woman remained inert. "Why did he not come with me?" she asked herself. A vague sadness oppressed her. He might, indeed, have deprived himself of his cigar!

The good sisters gave the signal to stop. They alighted, one after the other, leaving an odor of old and faded skirts.

Soon after they were gone another stopped the bus. A cook came in, red and out of breath. She sat down and placed her basket of provisions upon her knees. A strong odor of dishwater pervaded the omnibus.

"It is further than I thought," said the young woman to herself.

The undertaker got out and was replaced by a coachman who smelled of a stable. The girl in long hair was succeeded by an errand boy who exhaled the perfume of his walks.

The notary's wife perceived all these things, ill at ease and so disheartened that she was ready to weep without knowing why.

Some others got out; still others came in. The omnibus went on through the interminable streets, stopped at the station and began its route again.

"How far it is!" said Jeanne. "Especially when one has nothing of diversion and cannot sleep!" She had not been so much fatigued for many days.

Little by little all the travelers got out. She remained alone, all alone. The conductor shouted:

"Vaugirard!"

As she blushed he again repeated: "Vaugirard!"

She looked at him, not understanding that this must be addressed to her, as all her neighbors had gone. For the third time the man said: "Vaugirard!"

Then she asked: "Where are we?"

He answered in a gruff voice: "We are at Vaugirard, mademoiselle; I've told you twenty times already."

"Is it far from the boulevard?" she asked.

"What boulevard?"

"The Italian Boulevard."

"We passed that a long time ago."

"Ah! Will you be kind enough to tell my husband?"

"Your husband? Where is he?"

"On the outside."

"On the outside! It has been a long time since there was anybody there."

She made a terrified gesture. Then she said:

"How can it be? It is not possible. He got up there when I entered the omnibus. Look again; he must be there."

The conductor became rude. "Come, little one, this is talk enough. If there is one man lost there are ten to be found. Scamper out now! You will find another in the street."

The tears sprang to her eyes. She insisted: "But, sir, you are mistaken; I assure you that you are mistaken. He had a large pocketbook in his hand."

The employee began to laugh. "A large pocketbook? I remember. Yes, he got out at the Madeleine. That's right! He's left you behind! Hal Hal!"

The carriage was standing still. She got down and looked up, in spite of herself, to the roof, with an instinctive movement of the eye. It was totally deserted.

Then she began to weep aloud, without thinking that anyone was looking at or listening to her. Finally she said:

"What is going to become of me?"

The inspector came up and inquired: "What's the matter?"

The conductor answered in a jocosé fashion:

"This lady's husband has left her on the way."

The other replied: "Now, now, that is nothing. I am at your service." And he turned on his heels.

Then she began to walk ahead, too much frightened, too much excited to think even where she was going. Where was she going? What should she do? How could such an error have occurred? Such an act of carelessness, of disregard, of unheard-of distraction!

She had two francs in her pocket. To whom could she apply? Suddenly she remembered her cousin Barral, who was a clerk in the office of Naval Affairs.

She had just enough to hire a cab; she would go to him. And she met him just as he was starting for his office. Like Lebrument, he carried a large pocketbook under his arm.

She leaned out of the carriage and called: "Henry!"

He stopped, much surprised.

"Jeanne," he said, "here?—and alone? Where do you come from? What are you doing?"

She stammered, with her eyes full of tears: "My husband is lost somewhere."

"Lost? Where?"

"On the omnibus."

"On the omnibus! Oh!"

And she related to him the whole story, weeping much over the adventure.

He listened reflectively and then asked:

"This morning? And was his head perfectly clear?"

"Oh yes! And he had my dowry."

"Your dowry? The whole of it?"

"Yes, the whole of it—in order to pay for his office."

"Well, my dear cousin, your husband, whoever he is, is probably watching the wheel—this minute."

She did not yet comprehend. She stammered: "My husband—you say——"

"I say that he has run off with your—your capital—and that's all about it."

She remained standing there, suffocated with grief, murmuring:

"Then he is—he is—a wretch!"

Then overcome with emotion, she fell on her cousin's shoulder, sobbing violently.

As people were stopping to look at them, he guided her gently into the entrance of his house, supporting her body. They mounted the steps, and as the maid came to open the door he ordered her:

"Sophie, run to the restaurant and bring breakfast for two persons. I shall not go to the office this morning."

BED NO. 29

WHEN CAPTAIN EPIVENT passed in the street all the ladies turned to look at him. He was the true type of a handsome officer of hussars. He was always on parade, always strutted a little and seemed preoccupied and proud of his leg, his figure and his mustache. He had superb ones, it is true, a superb leg, figure and mustache. The last-named was blond, very heavy, falling martially from his lip in a beautiful sweep, the color of ripe wheat, carefully turned at the ends and falling over both sides of his mouth in two powerful sprigs of hair cut square across. His waist was thin, as if he wore a corset, while a vigorous masculine chest, bulged and arched, spread itself above his waist. His leg was admirable, a gymnastic leg, the leg of a dancer whose muscular flesh outlined each movement under the clinging cloth of the red pantaloons.

He walked with muscles taut, with feet and arms apart and with the

slightly balanced step of the cavalier who knows how to make the most of his limbs and his carriage and who seems a conqueror in a uniform but looks common-place in mufti.

Like many other officers, Captain Epivent carried a civil costume badly. He had no air of elegance as soon as he was clothed in the gray or black of the shop clerk. But in his proper setting he was a triumph. He had, besides, a handsome face, the nose thin and curved, blue eyes and a good forehead. He was bald, without ever being able to comprehend why his hair had fallen off. He consoled himself with thinking that with a heavy mustache, a head a little bald was not so bad.

He scorned everybody in general, with a difference in the degrees of his scorn.

In the first place, for him the middle class did not exist. He looked at them as he would look at animals, without according them more of his attention than he would give to sparrows or chickens. Officers alone counted in his world, but he did not have the same esteem for all officers. He only respected handsome men, an imposing presence, the true, military quality being first. A soldier was a merry fellow, a devil, created for love and war, a man of brawn, muscle and hair, nothing more. He classed the generals of the French army according to their figure, their bearing and the stern look of their faces. Bourbaki appeared to him the greatest warrior of modern times.

He often laughed at the officers of the line who were short and fat and puffed while marching. And he had a special scorn for the poor recruits from the polytechnic schools, those thin little men with spectacles, awkward and unskillful, who seemed as much made for a uniform as a wolf for saying Mass, as he often asserted. He was indignant that they should be tolerated in the army, those abortions with the lank limbs, who marched like crabs, did not drink, ate little and seemed to love equations better than pretty girls.

Captain Epivent himself had constant successes and triumphs with the fair sex.

Every time he took supper in company with a woman he thought himself certain of finishing the night with her upon the same mattress, and, if unsurmountable obstacles hindered that evening, his victory was sure at least the following day. His comrades did not like him to meet their mistresses, and the merchants in the shops, who had their pretty wives at the counter, knew him, feared him and hated him desperately. When he passed, the merchants' wives in spite of themselves exchanged a look with him through the glass of the front windows, one of those looks that avail more than tender words, which contain an appeal and a response, a desire and an avowal. And the husbands, who turned away with a sort of instinct, returned brusquely, casting a furious look

at the proud, arched silhouette of the officer. And when the captain had passed, smiling and content with his impression, the merchants, handling with nervous hands the objects spread out before them, declared:

"There's a great dandy. When shall we stop feeding all these good-for-nothings who go dragging their tinware through the streets? For my part, I would rather be a butcher than a soldier. Then if there's blood on my table it is the blood of beasts, at least. And he is useful, is the butcher, and the knife he carries has not killed men. I do not understand how these murderers are tolerated, walking on the public streets, carrying with them their instruments of death. It is necessary to have them, I suppose, but at least let them conceal themselves and not dress up in masquerade, with their red breeches and blue coats. The executioner doesn't dress himself up, does he?"

The woman, without answering, would shrug her shoulders, while the husband, divining the gesture without seeing it, would cry:

"Anybody must be stupid to watch those fellows parade up and down."

Nevertheless, Captain Epivent's reputation for conquests was well established in the whole French army.

Now, in 1868, his regiment, the One Hundred and Second Hussars, came into garrison at Rouen.

He was soon known in the town. He appeared every evening toward five o'clock upon the Boieldieu mall to take his absinthe and coffee at the Comedy, and before entering the establishment he would always take a turn upon the promenade to show his leg, his figure and his mustaches.

The merchants of Rouen who also promenaded there with their hands behind their backs, preoccupied with business affairs, speaking in high and low voices, would sometimes throw him a glance and murmur:

"Egad! That's a handsome fellow!"

But when they knew him they remarked:

"Look! Captain Epivent! But he's a rascal all the same!"

The women on meeting him had a very queer little movement of the head, a kind of shiver of modesty, as if they felt themselves grow weak or unclothed before him. They would lower their heads a little, with a smile upon their lips, as if they had a desire to be found charming and have a look from him. When he walked with a comrade the comrade never failed to murmur with jealous envy each time that he saw the sport:

"This rascal of an Epivent has the chances!"

Among the licensed girls of the town it was a struggle, a race, to see

who would carry him off. They all came at five o'clock, the officers' hour, to the Boieldieu mall and dragged their skirts up and down the length of the walk, two by two, while the lieutenants, captains and commanders, two by two, dragged their swords along the ground before entering the café.

One evening the beautiful Irma, the mistress, it was said, of M. Templier-Papon, the rich manufacturer, stopped her carriage in front of the Comedy and, getting out, made a pretense of buying some paper or some visiting cards of M. Paulard, the engraver, in order to pass before the officers' tables and cast a look at Captain Epivent which seemed to say: "When you will," so clearly that Colonel Prune, who was drinking the green liquor with his lieutenant colonel, could not help muttering:

"Confound that fellow! He has the chances, that scamp!"

The remark of the colonel was repeated, and Captain Epivent, moved by this approbation of his superior, passed the next day and many times after that under the windows of the beauty in his most captivating attitude.

She saw him, showed herself and smiled.

That same evening he was her lover.

They attracted attention, made an exhibition of their attachment and mutually compromised themselves, both of them proud of their adventure.

Nothing was so much talked of in town as the beautiful Irma and the officer. M. Templier-Papon alone was ignorant of their relation.

Captain Epivent beamed with glory; every instant he would say:

"Irma happened to say to me," "Irma told me tonight," or, "Yesterday at dinner Irma said——"

For a whole year they walked with and displayed in Rouen this love like a flag taken from the enemy. He felt himself aggrandized by this conquest, envied, more sure of the future, surer of the decoration so much desired, for the eyes of all were upon him, and he was satisfied to find himself well in sight, instead of being forgotten.

But here war was declared, and the captain's regiment was one of the first to be sent to the front. The adieux were lamentable. They lasted the whole night long.

Sword, red breeches, cap and jacket were all overturned from the back of a chair upon the floor; robes, skirts, silk stockings, also fallen down, were spread around and mingled with the uniform in distress upon the carpet, the room upside down, as if there had been a battle; Irma, wild, her hair unbound, threw her despairing arms around the officer's neck, straining him to her, then, leaving him, rolled upon the

floor, overturning furniture, catching fringes of the armchairs, biting their feet, while the captain, much moved but not skillful at consolation, repeated:

"Irma, my little Irma, do not cry so; it is necessary."

He occasionally wiped a tear from the corner of his eye with the end of his finger. They separated at daybreak. She followed her lover in her carriage as far as the first stopping place. Then she kissed him before the whole regiment at the moment of separation. They even found this very genteel, worthy and very romantic, and the comrades pressed the captain's hand and said to him:

"Confound you, rogue, she has a heart, all the same, the little one."

They seemed to see something patriotic in it.

The regiment was sorely proved during the campaign. The captain conducted himself heroically and finally received the Cross of Honor. Then the war ended; he returned to Rouen and the garrison.

Immediately upon his return he asked of news of Irma, but no one was able to give him anything exact. Some one said she was married to a Prussian major. Others, that she had gone to her parents who were farmers in the suburbs of Yvetot.

He even sent his orderly to the mayor's office to consult the registry of deaths. The name of his mistress was not to be found.

He was very angry, which fact he paraded everywhere. He even took the enemy to task for his unhappiness, attributing to the Prussians, who had occupied Rouen, the disappearance of the young girl, declaring:

"In the next war they shall pay well for it, the beggars!"

Then one morning as he entered the messroom at the breakfast hour, an old porter, in a blouse and an oilcloth cap, gave him a letter, which he opened and read:

MY DEARIE: I am in the hospital very ill, very ill. Will you not come and see me? It would give me so much pleasure! IRMA.

The captain grew pale and, moved with pity, declared:

"It's too bad! The poor girl! I will go there as soon as I breakfast."

And during the whole time at the table he told the officers that Irma was in the hospital and that he was going to see her that blessed morning. It must be the fault of those unspeakable Prussians. She had doubtless found herself alone without a sou, broken down with misery, for they must certainly have stolen her furniture.

"Ah, the dirty whelps!"

Everybody listened with great excitement. Scarcely had he slipped

his napkin in his wooden ring, when he rose and, taking his sword from the peg and swelling out his chest to make him thin, hooked his belt and set out with hurried step to the city hospital.

But entrance to the city hospital building, where he expected to enter immediately, was sharply refused him, and he was obliged to find his colonel and explain his case to him in order to get a word from him to the director.

This man, after having kept the handsome captain waiting some time in his anteroom, gave him an authorized pass and a cold and disapproving greeting.

Inside the door he felt himself constrained in this asylum of misery and suffering and death. A boy in the service showed him the way. He walked upon tiptoe, that he might make no noise, through the long corridors, where floated a slight, moist odor of illness and medicines. A murmur of voices alone disturbed the silence of the hospital.

At times through an open door the captain perceived a dormitory, with its rows of beds whose clothes were raised by the forms of the bodies.

Some convalescents were seated in chairs at the foot of their couches, sewing and clothed in the uniform gray cloth dress with white cap.

His guide suddenly stopped before one of these corridors filled with patients. He read on the door in large letters: "Syphilis." The captain started, then he felt that he was blushing. An attendant was preparing a medicine at a little wooden table at the door.

"I will show you," she said; "it is bed 29."

And she walked ahead of the officer. She indicated a bed: "There it is."

There was nothing to be seen but a bundle of bedclothes. Even the head was concealed under the coverlet. Everywhere faces were to be seen on the couches, pale faces, astonished at the sight of a uniform, the faces of women, young women and old women, but all seemingly plain and common in the humble, regulation garb.

The captain, very much disturbed, supporting his sword in one hand and carrying his cap in the other, murmured:

"Irma."

There was a sudden motion in the bed, and the face of his mistress appeared, but so changed, so tired, so thin, that he would scarcely have known it.

She gasped, overcome by emotion, and then said:

"Albert! Albert! It is you! Oh! I am so glad—so glad." And the tears ran down her cheeks.

The attendant brought a chair. "Be seated, sir," she said.

He sat down and looked at the pale, wretched countenance, so little like that of the beautiful, fresh girl he had left. Finally he said:

"What seems to be the matter with you?"

She replied, weeping: "You know well enough; it is written on the door." And she hid her eyes under the edge of the bedclothes.

Dismayed and ashamed, he continued: "How have you caught it, my poor girl?"

She answered: "It was those beasts of Prussians. They took me almost by force and then poisoned me."

He found nothing to add. He looked at her and kept turning his cap around on his knees.

The other patients gazed at him, and he believed that he detected an odor of putrefaction, of contaminated flesh, in this corridor full of girls tainted with this ignoble, terrible malady.

She murmured: "I do not believe that I shall recover. The doctor says it is very serious."

Then she perceived the cross upon the officer's breast and cried:

"Oh, you have been honored; now I am content. How contented I am! If I could only embrace you!"

A shiver of fear and disgust ran along the captain's skin at the thought of this kiss. He had a desire to make his escape, to be in the clear air and never see this woman again. He remained, however, not knowing how to make the adieux, and finally stammered:

"You took no care of yourself then."

A flame flashed in Irma's eyes: "No, the desire to avenge myself came to me when I should have broken away from it. And I poisoned them, too, all, all that I could. As long as there were any of them in Rouen, I had no thought for myself."

He declared in a constrained tone in which there was a little note of gaiety: "So far you have done some good."

Getting animated, and her cheekbones getting red, she answered:

"Oh yes, there will more than one of them die from my fault. I tell you, I had my vengeance."

Again he said: "So much the better." Then, rising, he added: "Well, I must leave you now, because I have only time to meet my appointment with the colonel."

She showed much emotion, crying out: "Already! You leave me already! And when you have scarcely arrived!"

But he wished to go at any cost and said:

"But you see that I came immediately, and it is absolutely necessary that I be at the colonel's at an appointed time."

She asked: "Is it still Colonel Prune?"

"Still Colonel Prune. He was twice wounded."

She continued: "And your comrades? Have some of them been killed?"

"Yes. Saint-Timon, Savagnat, Poli, Saprival, Robert, De Courson, Pasafil, Santal, Caravan and Poivrin are dead. Sahel had an arm carried off and Courvoison a leg amputated. Paquet lost his right eye."

She listened, much interested. Then suddenly she stammered:

"Will you kiss me, say, before you leave me? Madame Langlois is not there."

And in spite of the disgust which came to his lips, he placed them against the wan forehead, while she, throwing her arms around him, scattered random kisses over his blue jacket.

Then she said: "You will come again? Say that you will come again. Promise me that you will."

"Yes, I promise."

"When, now? Can you come Thursday?"

"Yes, Thursday."

"Thursday at two o'clock?"

"Yes, Thursday at two o'clock."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

"Adieu, my dearie."

"Adieu."

And he went away, confused by the staring glances of those in the dormitory, bending his tall form to make himself seem smaller. And when he was in the street he took a long breath.

That evening his comrades asked him: "Well, how is Irma?"

He answered in a constrained voice: "She has a trouble with the lungs; she is very ill."

But a little lieutenant, scenting something from his manner, went to headquarters, and the next day when the captain went into mess he was welcomed by a volley of laughter and jokes. They had found vengeance at last.

It was learned further that Irma had made a spite marriage with the staff major of the Prussians, that she had gone through the country on horseback with the colonel of the Blue Hussars and many others, and that in Rouen she was no longer called anything but the "wife of the Prussians."

For eight days the captain was the victim of his regiment. He received by post and by messenger notes from those who can reveal the past and the future, circulars of specialists, and medicines, the nature of which was inscribed on the package.

And the colonel, catching the drift of it, said in a severe tone:

"Well, the captain had a pretty acquaintance! I send him my compliments."

At the end of twelve days he was appealed to by another letter from Irma. He tore it up with rage and made no reply to it.

A week later she wrote him again that she was very ill and wished to see him to say farewell.

He did not answer.

After some days more he received a note from a chaplain of the hospital:

The girl Irma Pavolin is on her deathbed and begs you to come.

He dared not refuse to oblige the chaplain, but he entered the hospital with a heart swelling with wicked anger, with wounded vanity and humiliation.

He found her scarcely changed at all and thought that she had deceived him. "What do you wish of me?" he asked.

"I wish to say farewell. It appears that I am near the end."

He did not believe it.

"Listen," he said, "you have made me the laughingstock of the regiment, and I do not wish it to continue."

She asked: "What have I done?"

He was irritated at not knowing how to answer. But he said:

"Is it nothing that I return here to be joked by everybody on your account?"

She looked at him with languid eyes, where shone a pale light of anger, and answered:

"What can I have done? I have not been genteel with you, perhaps! Is it because I have sometimes asked for something? But for you, I would have remained with Monsieur Templier-Papon and would not have found myself here today. No, you see, if anyone has reproaches to make it is not you."

He answered in a clear tone: "I have not made reproaches, but I cannot continue to come to see you, because your conduct with the Prussians has been the shame of the town."

She sat up with a little shake in the bed as she replied:

"My conduct with the Prussians? But when I tell you that they took me, and when I tell you that if I took no thought of myself, it was because I wished to poison them! If I had wished to cure myself it would not have been so difficult, I can tell you! But I wished to kill them, and I have killed them, come now! I have killed them!"

He remained standing. "In any case," he said, "it was a shame."

She had a kind of suffocation and then replied:

"Why is it a shame for me to cause them to die and try to extermi-

nate them, tell me? You did not talk that way when you used to come to my house in Jeanne-d'Arc Street. Ah! It is a shame! You have not done as much with your Cross of Honor! I deserve more merit than you, do you understand? More than you, for I have killed more Prussians than you!"

He stood, stupefied, before her, trembling with indignation. He stammered: "Be still—you must—be still—because those things—I cannot allow—anyone to touch upon——"

But she was not listening. "What harm have you done the Prussians? Would it ever have happened if you had kept them from coming to Rouen? Tell me! It is you who should stop and listen. And I have done more harm than you, I, yes, more harm to them than you, and I am going to die for it, while you are singing songs and making yourself fine to inveigle women."

Upon each bed a head was raised, and all eyes looked at this man in uniform who stammered again:

"You must be still—more quiet—you know——"

But she would not be quiet. She cried out:

"Ah, yes, you are a pretty poser! I know you well. I know you. And I tell you that I have done more harm than you—I—and that I have killed more than all your regiment together. Come now, you coward."

He went away; in fact, he fled, stretching his long legs as he passed between the two rows of beds where the syphilitic patients were becoming excited. And he heard the gasping, stifled voice of Irma pursuing him:

"More than you—yes—I have killed more than you."

He tumbled down the staircase four steps at a time and ran until he was shut fast in his room.

The next day he heard that she was dead.

MARROCA

YOU ASK ME, my dear friend, to send you my impressions of Africa and an account of my adventures, especially of my love affairs, in this seductive land. You laughed a great deal beforehand at my dusky sweethearts, as you called them, and declared that you could see me, returning to France, followed by a tall ebony-colored woman, with a yellow silk handkerchief round her head, and wearing voluminous bright-colored trousers.

No doubt the Moorish dames will have their turn, for I have seen several who made me feel very much inclined to fall in love with them.

But by way of making a beginning, I came across something better and very original.

In your last letter to me you say: "When I know how people love in a country I know that country well enough to describe it, although I may never have seen it." Let me tell you then that here they love furiously. From the very first moment one feels a sort of trembling ardor, of constant desire, to the very tips of the fingers, which over-excites the powers and faculties of physical sensation, from the simple contact of the hands down to the requirement which makes us commit so many follies.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not know whether you call love of the heart a love of the soul, whether sentimental idealism, platonic love, in a word, can exist on this earth; I doubt it myself. But that other love, sensual love, which has something good, a great deal of good about it, is really terrible in this climate. The heat, the burning atmosphere which makes you feverish, the suffocating blasts of wind from the south, waves of fire from the desert which is so near us, that oppressive sirocco which is more destructive and withering than fire, a perpetual conflagration of an entire continent, burned even to its stones by a fierce and devouring sun, inflame the blood, excite the flesh and make brutes of us.

But to come to my story. I shall not dwell on the beginning of my stay in Africa. After visiting Bona, Constantine, Biskara and Steif, I went to Bougie through the defiles of Chabet, by an excellent road cut through a large forest, which follows the sea at a height of six hundred feet above it and leads to that wonderful bay of Bougie, which is as beautiful as that of Naples, of Ajaccio or of Douarnenez, which are the most lovely that I know of.

Far away in the distance, before one rounds the large inlet where the water is perfectly calm, one sees Bougie. It is built on the steep sides of a high hill covered with trees, and forms a white spot on that green slope; it might almost be taken for the foam of a cascade falling into the sea.

I had no sooner set foot in that small, delightful town, than I knew that I should stay for a long time. In all directions the eye rests on rugged, strangely shaped hilltops, so close together that you can hardly see the open sea, so that the gulf looks like a lake. The blue water is wonderfully transparent, and the azure sky, a deep azure, as if it had received two coats of color, expands its wonderful beauty above it. They seem to be looking at themselves in a glass, a veritable reflection of each other.

Bougie is a town of ruins, and on the quay is such magnificent ruin that you might imagine you were at the opera. It is the old Saracen

Gate, overgrown with ivy, and there are ruins in all directions on the hills round the town, fragments of Roman walls, bits of Saracen monuments and remains of Arabic buildings.

I had taken a small Moorish house in the upper town. You know those dwellings, which have been described so often. They have no windows on the outside, but they are lighted from top to bottom by an inner court. On the first floor they have a large, cool room, in which one spends the days, and a terrace on the roof, on which one spends the nights.

I at once fell in with the custom of all hot countries, that is to say, of taking a siesta after lunch. That is the hottest time in Africa, the time when one can scarcely breathe, when the streets, the fields and the long, dazzling, white roads are deserted, when everyone is asleep or, at any rate, trying to sleep, attired as scantily as possible.

In my drawing room, which had columns of Arabic architecture, I had placed a large, soft couch, covered with a carpet from Djebel Amour. There, very nearly in the costume of Assan, I sought to rest, but I could not sleep, as I was tortured by continence. There are two forms of torture on this earth which I hope you will never know: the want of water and the want of women, and I do not know which is the worst. In the desert men would commit any infamy for the sake of a glass of clean, cold water, and what would one not do in some of the towns of the littoral for the companionship of a handsome woman? There is no lack of girls in Africa; on the contrary, they abound, but, to continue my comparison, they are as unwholesome as the muddy water in the pools of Sahara.

Well, one day when I was feeling more enervated than usual, I was trying in vain to close my eyes. My legs twitched as if they were being pricked, and I tossed about uneasily on my couch. At last, unable to bear it any longer, I got up and went out. It was a terribly hot day in the middle of July, and the pavement was hot enough to bake bread on. My shirt, which was soaked with perspiration, clung to my body; on the horizon there was a slight, white vapor, which seemed to be palpable heat.

I went down to the sea and, circling the port, walked along the shore of the pretty bay where the baths are. There was nobody about, and nothing was stirring; not a sound of bird or of beast was to be heard; the very waves did not lap, and the sea appeared to be asleep in the sun.

Suddenly, behind one of the rocks which were half covered by the silent water, I heard a slight movement. Turning round, I saw a tall, naked girl, sitting up to her bosom in the water, taking a bath; no doubt she reckoned on being alone at that hot period of the day. Her

head was turned toward the sea, and she was moving gently up and down, without seeing me.

Nothing could be more surprising than that picture of a beautiful woman in the water, which was as clear as crystal, under a blaze of light. She was a statue. She turned round, uttered a cry and, half swimming, half walking, hid herself altogether behind her rock. I knew she must necessarily come out, so I sat down on the beach and waited. Presently she just showed her head, which was covered with thick black plaits of hair. She had a rather large mouth, with full lips, large, bold eyes, and her skin, which was tanned by the climate, looked like a piece of old, hard, polished ivory.

She called out to me: "Go away!" and her full voice, which corresponded to her strong build, had a guttural accent. As I did not move, she added: "It is not right of you to stop there, monsieur." I did not move, however, and her head disappeared. Ten minutes passed, and then her hair, then her forehead and then her eyes reappeared, but slowly and prudently, as if she were playing at hide-and-seek and were looking to see who was near. This time she was furious and called out: "You will make me catch a chill, for I shall not come out as long as you are there." Thereupon I got up and went away, but not without looking round several times. When she thought I was far enough off she came out of the water. Bending down and turning her back to me, she disappeared in a cavity of the rock behind a petticoat that was hanging up in front of it.

I went back the next day. She was bathing again, but she had a bathing costume and she began to laugh and showed her white teeth. A week later we were friends, and in another week we were eager lovers. Her name was Marroca, and she pronounced it as if there were a dozen *rs* in it. She was the daughter of Spanish colonists and had married a Frenchman, whose name was Pontabèze. He was in government employ, though I never exactly knew what his functions were. I found out that he was always very busy, and I did not care for anything else.

She then altered her time for having her bath and came to my house every day to take her siesta there. What a siesta! It could scarcely be called reposing! She was a splendid girl of a somewhat animal but superb type. Her eyes were always glowing with passion; her half-open mouth, her sharp teeth and even her smiles had something ferociously loving about them, and her curious long and conical breasts gave her whole body something of the animal, made her a sort of inferior yet magnificent being, a creature destined for unbridled love, and roused in me the idea of those ancient deities who gave expression to their tenderness on the grass and under the trees.

And then her mind was as simple as two and two are four, and a sonorous laugh served her instead of thought.

Instinctively proud of her beauty, she hated the slightest covering and ran and frisked about my house with daring and unconscious immodesty. When she was at last overcome and worn out by her cries and movements, she used to sleep soundly and peacefully, while the overwhelming heat brought out minute spots of perspiration on her brown skin.

Sometimes she returned in the evening, when her husband was on duty somewhere, and we used to lie on the terrace, scarcely covered by some fine, gauzy oriental fabric. When the full moon lit up the town and the gulf, with its surrounding frame of hills, we saw on all the other terraces a recumbent army of silent phantoms who would occasionally get up, change their places and lie down again in the languorous warmth of the starry night.

In spite of the brightness of African nights, Marroca would insist upon stripping herself almost naked in the clear rays of the moon; she did not trouble herself much about anybody who might see us, and often, in spite of my fears and entreaties, she uttered long, resounding cries, which made the dogs in the distance howl.

One night, when I was sleeping under the starry sky, she came and kneeled down on my carpet and, putting her lips, which curled slightly, close to my face, she said:

"You must come and stay at my house."

I did not understand her and asked:

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, when my husband has gone away you must come and be with me."

I could not help laughing and said: "Why, as you come here?"

And she went on, almost talking into my mouth, sending her hot breath into my throat and moistening my mustache with her lips:

"I want it as a remembrance."

Still I did not grasp her meaning. Then she put her arms around my neck and said: "When you are no longer here I shall think of it."

I was touched and amused at the same time and replied: "You must be mad. I would much rather stop here."

As a matter of fact, I have no liking for assignations under the conjugal roof; they are mousetraps in which the unwary are always caught. But she begged and prayed and even cried and at last said: "You shall see how I will love you there."

Her wish seemed so strange that I could not explain it to myself, but on thinking it over, I thought I could discern a profound hatred

for her husband, the secret vengeance of a woman who takes pleasure in deceiving him and who, moreover, wishes to deceive him in his own house.

"Is your husband very unkind to you?" I asked her. She looked vexed and said:

"Oh no, he is very kind."

"But you are not fond of him?"

She looked at me with astonishment in her large eyes. "Indeed, I am very fond of him, very, but not so fond as I am of you."

I could not understand it all, and while I was trying to get at her meaning she pressed one of those kisses, whose power she knew so well, onto my lips and whispered: "But you will come, will you not?"

I resisted, however, and so she got up immediately and went away; nor did she come back for a week. On the eighth day she came back, stopped gravely at the door of my abode and said: "Are you coming to my house tonight? If you refuse I shall go away."

Eight days is a very long time my friend, and in Africa those eight days are as good as a month. "Yes," I said and opened my arms, and she threw herself into them.

At night she waited for me in a neighboring street and took me to their house, which was very small and near the harbor. I first of all went through the kitchen, where they had their meals, and then into a very tidy, whitewashed room with photographs on the walls and paper flowers under a glass case. Marroca seemed beside herself with pleasure, and she jumped about and said: "There, you are at home now." And I certainly acted as though I were, though I felt rather embarrassed and somewhat uneasy.

Suddenly a loud knocking at the door made us start, and a man's voice called out: "Marroca, it is I."

She started: "My husband! Here, hide under the bed, quickly."

I was distractedly looking for my coat, but she gave me a push and panted out: "Come along, come along."

I lay down flat on my stomach and crept under the bed without a word, while she went into the kitchen. I heard her open a cupboard and then shut it again, and she came back into the room carrying some object which I could not see but which she quickly put down. Then as her husband was getting impatient, she said calmly: "I cannot find the matches." Suddenly she added: "Oh, here they are: I will come and let you in."

The man came in, and I could see nothing of him but his feet, which were enormous. If the rest of him was in proportion he must have been a giant.

I heard kisses, a little pat on her naked flesh and a laugh, and he said in a strong Marseilles accent: "I forgot my purse, so I was obliged to come back; you were sound asleep, I suppose?"

He went to the cupboard and was a long time in finding what he wanted; and as Marroca had thrown herself on the bed, as if she were tired out, he went up to her and no doubt tried to caress her, for she flung a volley of angry *rs* at him. His feet were so close to me that I felt a stupid, inexplicable longing to catch hold of them, but I restrained myself. When he saw that he could not succeed in his wish he got angry and said: "You are not at all nice tonight. Good-by."

I heard another kiss, then the big feet turned, and I saw the nails in his shoes as he went into the next room; the front door was shut, and I was saved!

I came slowly out of my retreat, feeling rather humiliated, and while Marroca danced a jig around me, shouting with laughter and clapping her hands, I threw myself heavily into a chair. But I jumped up with a bound, for I had sat down on something cold, and as I was no more dressed than my accomplice was, the contact made me start. I looked round. I had sat down on a small ax used for cutting wood and as sharp as a knife. How had it got there? I had certainly not seen it when I went in, but Marroca, seeing me jump up, nearly choked with laughter and coughed with both hands on her sides.

I thought her amusement rather out of place; we had risked our lives stupidly. I still felt a cold shiver down my back, and I was rather hurt at her foolish laughter.

"Supposing your husband had seen me?" I said.

"There was no danger of that," she replied.

"What do you mean? No danger? That is a good joke! If he had stooped down he must have seen me."

She did not laugh any more; she only looked at me with her large eyes, which were bright with merriment.

"He would not have stooped."

"Why?" I persisted. "Just suppose he had let his hat fall, he would have been sure to pick it up, and then—I was well prepared to defend myself in this costume!"

She put her two strong, round arms about my neck and, lowering her voice, as she did when she said, "I *adorre* you," she whispered:

"Then he would *never* have got up again."

I did not understand her and said: "What do you mean?"

She gave me a cunning wink and put her hand to the chair on which I had sat down, and her outstretched hands, her smile, her half-open lips, her white, sharp and ferocious teeth, all drew my attention to the little ax which was used for cutting wood, the sharp blade of which

was glistening in the candlelight. While she put out her hand as if she were going to take it, she put her left arm round me and, drawing me to her and putting her lips against mine, with her right arm she made a motion as if she were cutting off the head of a kneeling man!

This, my friend, is the manner in which people here understand conjugal duties, love and hospitality!"

A PHILOSOPHER

BLÉROT had been my most intimate friend from childhood; we had no secrets from each other and were united heart and soul by a brotherly intimacy and a boundless confidence in each other. I had been intrusted with the secret of all his love affairs, as he had been with mine.

When he told me that he was going to get married I was hurt, just as if he had been guilty of a treacherous act with regard to me. I felt that it must interfere with that cordial and absolute affection which had united us hitherto. His wife would come between us. The intimacy of the marriage bed establishes a kind of complicity, a mysterious alliance between two persons, even when they have ceased to love each other. Man and wife are like two discreet partners who will not let anyone else into their secrets. But that close bond which the conjugal kiss fastens is widely loosened on the day on which the woman takes a lover.

I remember Blérot's wedding as if it were but yesterday. I would not be present at the signing of the marriage contract, as I have no particular liking for such ceremonies. I only went to the civil wedding and to the church.

His wife, whom I had never seen before, was a tall, slight girl with pale hair, pale cheeks, pale hands and eyes to match. She walked with a slightly undulating motion, as if she were on board a ship, and seemed to advance with the succession of long, graceful courtesies.

Blérot seemed very much in love with her. He looked at her constantly, and I felt a shiver of an immoderate desire for her pass through my frame.

I went to see him in a few days, and he said to me:

"You do not know how happy I am; I am madly in love with her, but then she is—she is——" He did not finish his sentence, but he put the tips of his fingers to his lips with a gesture which signified "divine! delicious! perfect!" and a good deal more besides.

I asked, laughing, "What? All that?"

"Everything that you can imagine," was his answer.

He introduced me to her. She was very pleasant, on easy terms with

me, as was natural, and begged me to look upon their house as my own. I felt that he, Blérot, did not belong to me any longer. Our intimacy was altogether checked, and we hardly found a word to say to each other.

I soon took my leave and shortly afterward went to the East, returning by way of Russia, Germany, Sweden and Holland after an absence of eighteen months from Paris.

The morning after my arrival, as I was walking along the boulevards to breathe the air once more, I saw a pale man with sunken cheeks coming toward me, who was as much like Blérot as it was possible for a physical, emaciated man to resemble a strong, ruddy, rather stout man. I looked at him in surprise and asked myself: "Can it possibly be he?" But he saw me and came toward me with outstretched arms, and we embraced in the middle of the boulevard.

After we had gone up and down once or twice from the Rue Drouot to the Vaudeville Theater, just as we were taking leave of each other—for he already seemed quite done up with walking—I said to him:

"You don't look at all well. Are you ill?"

"I do feel rather out of sorts," was all he said.

He looked like a man who was going to die, and I felt a flood of affection for my old friend, the only real one that I had ever had. I squeezed his hands.

"What is the matter with you? Are you in pain?"

"A little tired, but it is nothing."

"What does your doctor say?"

"He calls it anemia, and has ordered me to eat no white meat and to take tincture of iron."

A suspicion flashed across me.

"Are you happy?" I asked him.

"Yes, very happy; my wife is charming, and I love her more than ever."

But I noticed that he grew rather red and seemed embarrassed, as if he were afraid of any further questions, so I took him by the arm and pushed him into a café, which was nearly empty at that time of day. I forced him to sit down and, looking him straight in the face, I said:

"Look here, old fellow, just tell me the exact truth."

"I have nothing to tell you," he stammered.

"That is not true," I replied firmly. "You are ill, mentally, perhaps, and you dare not reveal your secret to anyone. Something or other is doing you harm, and I mean you to tell me what it is. Come, I am waiting for you to begin."

Again he got very red, stammered, and turning his head away, he said:

"It is very idiotic—but I—I am done for!"

As he did not go on, I said:

"Just tell me what it is."

"Well, I have got a wife who is killing me; that is all," he said abruptly, almost desperately.

I did not understand at first. "Does she make you unhappy? How? What is it?"

"No," he replied in a low voice, as if he were confessing some crime; "I love her too much; that is all."

I was thunderstruck at this singular avowal, and then I felt inclined to laugh, but at length I managed to reply:

"But surely, at least so it seems to me, you might manage to—to love her a little less."

He had got very pale again and at length made up his mind to speak to me openly, as he used to do formerly.

"No," he said, "that is impossible, and I am dying from it; I know; it is killing me, and I am really frightened. Some days, like today, I feel inclined to leave her, to go away altogether, to start for the other end of the world, so as to live for a long time; and then when the evening comes I return home in spite of myself, but slowly, and feeling uncomfortable. I go upstairs hesitatingly and ring, and when I go in I see her there, sitting in her easy chair, and she will say, 'How late you are.' I kiss her, and we sit down to dinner. During the meal I make this resolve: 'I will go directly it is over and take the train for somewhere, no matter where,' but when we get back to the drawing room I am so tired that I have not the courage to get up out of my chair, and so I remain and then—and then—and then—I succumb again."

I could not help smiling again. He saw it and said: "You may laugh, but I assure you it is very horrible."

"Why don't you tell your wife?" I asked him. "Unless she be a regular monster she would understand."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is all very well for you to talk. I don't tell her because I know her nature. Have you ever heard it said of certain women, 'She has just married a third time?' Well, and that makes you laugh like you did just now, and yet it is true. What is to be done? It is neither her fault nor mine. She is so, because nature has made her so; I assure you, my dear old friend, she has the temperament of a Messalina. She does not know it, but I do; so much the worse for me. She is charming, gentle, tender, and thinks that our conjugal intercourse, which is wearing me out and killing me, is natural and quite moderate. She seems like an ignorant schoolgirl, and she really is ignorant, poor child.

"Every day I form energetic resolutions, for you must understand

that I am dying. But one look of her eyes, one of those looks in which I can read the ardent desire of her lips, is enough for me, and I succumb at once, saying to myself: 'This is really the end: I will have no more of her death-giving kisses,' and then when I have yielded again, like I have today, I go out and walk and walk, thinking of death and saying to myself that I am lost, that all is over.

"I am mentally so ill that I went for a walk to Père Lachaise cemetery yesterday. I looked at all the graves, standing in a row like dominoes, and I thought to myself: 'I shall soon be there,' and then I returned home, quite determined to pretend to be ill and so escape, but I could not.

"Oh! You don't know what it is. Ask a smoker who is poisoning himself with nicotine whether he can give up his delicious and deadly habit. He will tell you that he has tried a hundred times without success, and he will, perhaps, add: 'So much the worse, but I would rather die than go without tobacco.' That is just the case with me. When once one is in the clutches of such a passion or such a habit, one must give oneself up to it entirely."

He got up and gave me his hand. I felt seized with a tumult of rage and with hatred for this woman, this careless, charming, terrible woman, and as he was buttoning up his coat to go out I said to him, brutally perhaps:

"But in God's name, why don't you let her have a lover, rather than kill yourself like that?"

He shrugged his shoulders without replying and went off.

For six months I did not see him. Every morning I expected a letter of invitation to his funeral, but I would not go to his house from a complicated feeling of contempt for him and for that woman, of anger, of indignation, of a thousand sensations.

One lovely spring morning I was in the Champs Elysées. It was one of those warm days which makes our eyes bright and stir up in us a tumultuous feeling of happiness from the mere sense of existence. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and, turning round, I saw my old friend, looking well, stout and rosy.

He gave me both hands, beaming with pleasure, and exclaimed:

"Here you are, you erratic individual!"

I looked at him, utterly thunderstruck.

"Well, on my word—yes. By Jove! I congratulate you; you have indeed changed in the last six months!"

He flushed scarlet and said with an embarrassed laugh:

"One can but do one's best."

I looked at him so obstinately that he evidently felt uncomfortable, so I went on:

"So—now—you are—completely cured?"

He stammered hastily:

"Yes, perfectly, thank you." Then, changing his tone, "How lucky that I should have come across you, old fellow. I hope we shall often meet now."

But I would not give up my idea; I wanted to know how matters really stood, so I asked:

"Don't you remember what you told me six months ago? I suppose—I—eh—suppose you resist now?"

"Please don't talk any more about it," he replied uneasily; "forget that I mentioned it to you; leave me alone. But, you know, I have no intention of letting you go; you must come and dine at my house."

A sudden fancy took me to see for myself how matters stood, so that I might understand all about it, and I accepted.

His wife received me in a most charming manner, and she was, as a matter of fact, a most attractive woman. Her long hands, her neck and cheeks were beautifully white and delicate and marked her breeding, and her walk was undulating and delightful.

René gave her a brotherly kiss on the forehead and said:

"Has not Lucien come yet?"

"Not yet," she replied in a clear, soft voice; "you know he is almost always rather late."

At that moment the bell rang, and a tall man was shown in. He was dark, with a thick beard, and looked like a modern Hercules. We were introduced to each other; his name was Lucien Delabarre.

René and he shook hands in a most friendly manner, and then we went to dinner.

It was a most enjoyable meal, without the least constraint. My old friend spoke with me constantly in the old, familiar, cordial manner, just as he used to do. It was: "You know, old fellow!" "I say, old fellow!" "Just listen a moment, old fellow!" Suddenly he exclaimed:

"You don't know how glad I am to see you again; it takes me back to old times."

I looked at his wife and the other man. Their attitude was perfectly correct, though I fancied once or twice that they exchanged a rapid and furtive look.

As soon as dinner was over René turned to his wife and said:

"My dear, I have just met Pierre again, and I am going to carry him off for a walk and chat along the boulevards to remind us of old times. I am leaving you in very good company."

The young woman smiled and said to me as she shook hands with me:

"Don't keep him too long."

As we went along arm in arm I could not help saying to him, for I was determined to know how matters stood:

"What has happened? Do tell me!"

He, however, interrupted me roughly and answered like a man who has been disturbed without any reason.

"Just look here, old fellow; leave one alone with your questions."

Then he added, half aloud, as if talking to himself:

"After all, it would have been stupid to have let oneself go to perdition like that."

I did not press him. We walked on quickly and began to talk. All of a sudden he whispered in my ear:

"I say, suppose we go and have a bottle of fizz with some girls! Eh?"

I could not prevent myself from laughing heartily.

"Just as you like; come along, let us go."

A MISTAKE

THAT DAY Boniface, the letter carrier, found in leaving the post office that his route would not be so long and therefore felt a lively delight.

He had charge of the country around Vireville and, when he returned in the evening, he often found he had covered over twenty miles in his long march.

Today the distribution would be easy; he could even stroll along a little and be home by three o'clock in the afternoon. What luck!

He went out along the Sennemare road and commenced his work. It was June, the month of verdure and flowers, the true month of the fields and meadows.

The man, in his blue blouse and black cap with red braid, crossed through bypaths, fields of millet, oats and wheat, buried to the shoulders in their depths; and his head, moving along above the feathery waves, seemed to float upon a calm and verdant sea, which a light breeze caused to undulate gently. He entered the farms through wooden gateways built on the slopes and shaded by two rows of beech trees, greeted the farmer by name: "Good morning, Monsieur Chicot," and passed him his newspaper, *The Little Norman*.

The farmer would wipe his hand on his trousers, receive the paper and slide it into his pocket to read at his ease after the midday meal. The dogs, asleep in barrels under the drooping apple trees, yapped with fury, pulling at their chains, but the carrier, without turning, proceeded at his military gait, stretching his long limbs, the left arm over his bag, the right manipulating his cane which marched like himself, in a continuous, hurried fashion.

He distributed his printed matter and his letters in the hamlet of Sennemare, then set out across the fields with a paper for the tax collector who lived in a little isolated house a quarter of a mile from the village.

He was a new collector, this M. Chapatis, arrived but the week before and lately married.

He took a Paris paper, and sometimes Carrier Boniface, when he had time, would take a look at it before delivering it at its destination.

Now he opened his bag, took out the paper, slipped it out of its wrapper, unfolded it and began to read while walking. The first page did not interest him; politics did not arouse him; the finance he always passed over, but the general facts of the day he read eagerly.

That day they were very exciting. He became so much interested in the story of a crime executed in a gamekeeper's lodge that he stopped in the middle of a clover field to read it more slowly. The details were frightful. A woodcutter, in passing the forester's house the morning after, had noticed a little blood upon the sill, as if someone had been bleeding from the nose. "The keeper must have killed a wolf last night," he thought, but coming nearer, he perceived that the door was left open and that the lock had been broken. Then, seized with fear, he ran to the village, notified the mayor, who took with him as a reinforcement the keeper of fields and the schoolmaster; these four men returned together. They found the forester with his throat cut before the chimney piece, his wife strangled on the bed and their little daughter, aged six years, stifled under two mattresses.

Carrier Boniface became so wrought up over the thought of this assassination whose horrible details had been revealed to him one by one that he felt a weakness in his limbs and said aloud:

"Christopher! But some of the people in this world are brutes!"

Then he replaced the journal in its wrapper and went on, his head full of visions of the crime. He arrived shortly at M. Chapatis's. He opened the gate of the little garden and approached the house. It was of low construction, containing only one story and a mansard roof. It was at least five hundred feet from its nearest neighbor.

The carrier mounted the two front steps, placed his hand upon the knob, trying to open the door, but found it locked. Then he perceived that the shutters had not been opened and that no one had come out that morning.

A feeling of alarm took possession of him, for M. Chapatis, since his arrival, had always been up rather early. It was then only ten minutes after seven, nearly an hour earlier than he usually got there. No matter. The tax collector ought to be up before that.

He made a tour around the house, walking with much precaution,

as if he himself might be in some danger. He noticed nothing suspicious except a man's footprints on a strawberry bed.

But suddenly he remained motionless as he was passing a window, powerless from fright. A groan came from the house.

He approached nearer and, stepping over a border of thyme, glued his ear to the opening in order to hear better; assuredly someone was groaning. He could plainly hear long, dolorous sighs, a kind of rattle, a noise of struggle. Then the groans became louder and oft repeated, finally being accentuated and changing into cries.

Then Boniface, no longer doubtful that a crime was being committed, took to his legs, recrossed the little garden, flew across the field and the meadow, running until he was out of breath, his bag shaking and hitting against his hip, and arrived gasping and in dismay at the door of the police headquarters.

Brigadier Malautour was mending a broken chair by means of some brads and a hammer. Gendarme Rauter held the damaged piece of furniture between his knees and placed a nail at the edge of the crack; then the brigadier, chewing his mustache, his eyes round and moist with interest in his work, would pound—blows which fell on the fingers of his subordinate.

When the letter carrier perceived them he cried out:

"Come quick; someone is assassinating the tax collector. Quick! Quick!"

The two men ceased their work and raised their heads, the astonished heads of people surprised and perplexed.

Boniface, seeing more surprise than haste, repeated:

"Quick! Quick! The robbers are in the house. I heard the cries. There is no time to be lost."

The brigadier, placing his hammer on the ground, remarked: "How was it you found out about this?"

The carrier answered: "I went to carry the paper and two letters, when I noticed that the door was locked and that the collector had not been out. I walked around the house, trying to account for it, when suddenly I heard someone groan as if he were being strangled, as if his throat were being cut—and then I started as soon as I could to get you. There's no time to be lost."

"And you didn't try to help any?"

The carrier, much frightened, replied:

"I was afraid that one was too small a number."

Then the brigadier, convinced, said:

"Give me time to get into my uniform and I will follow you."

And he went into the building, followed by his subordinate who

carried the chair. They reappeared almost immediately, and all three started in quick, trained step for the scene of the crime.

Arriving near the house, they slackened their pace through precaution, and the brigadier drew his revolver; then they went softly into the garden and approached the walls of the dwelling. There was nothing to indicate that the malefactors had gone away. The door remained locked, the windows closed.

"Let us wait for them," murmured the brigadier.

But Boniface, palpitating with emotion, made them pass around to the other side and showed them an opening. "It is there," he said.

The brigadier advanced alone and fixed his ear against the board. The two others waited, ready for anything, watching him closely.

He remained a long time, motionless, listening. The better to bring his head near the wooden shutter, he had removed this three-cornered hat and held it in his right hand.

What did he hear? His face revealed nothing for some time, then suddenly his mustache rose at the corners; his cheeks took on folds as in a silent laugh and, stepping over the border of thyme, he came toward the two men who were looking at him in a kind of stupor.

Walking along on the tips of his toes, he made the sign for them to follow, and when they came to the gate he advised Boniface to slip the paper and the letters under the door.

The amazed carrier obeyed with perfect docility.

"And now, back again," said the brigadier.

When they had gone a little way he turned to the letter carrier with a jocose air, his eyes upturned and shining with fun, and said in a bantering tone:

"Well, you are a rogue, you are!"

The old fellow asked: "Why? I heard something. I swear to you I heard something."

Then the brigadier, no longer able to restrain himself, laughed aloud. He laughed to suffocation, his two hands holding his sides, doubling himself up, his eyes full of tears, and making frightful grimaces about the nose. Both of them were frightened to look at him.

As he could neither speak nor cease laughing, nor make them understand, he made a gesture, a popular, meaning gesture. As they could not comprehend that either, he kept repeating it, motioning back always with his head.

Finally his subordinate caught the meaning suddenly and in his turn broke into formidable laughter. The old fellow remained stupefied between these two men who were twisting themselves into all shapes.

The brigadier finally became calm and, giving the old man a great tap on his waistcoat, like a jolly good fellow, he cried:

"What a farce! A holy farce! I shall record it as the Crime of Father Boniface!"

The carrier opened his enormous eyes and repeated:

"I swear to you that I heard something."

The brigadier began to laugh. His subordinate sat down on the grass beside the ditch and laughed at his ease.

"Ah! You heard something. And your wife, do you assassinate her that way, hey, you old joker?"

"My wife?"

And he stood reflecting a long time, then he continued:

"My wife. Yes, she bawls if I strike her—and bawls that are bawls, why? Was Monsieur Chapatis beating his wife?"

Then the brigadier, in a delirium of humor, turned him around by the shoulders as if he had been a puppet and whispered in his ear something that caused him to look besotted with astonishment.

Then the old man murmured pensively:

"No? Not that—not that. She said nothing—mine—I would never have believed—— Is it possible? One would swear that a murder——"

And confused, disconcerted and ashamed, he went on his way across the fields, while the two policemen, laughing continually and calling back to him from afar with barrack-room wit, watched his black cap as it disappeared in the tranquil sea of grain.

CONSIDERATION

SIMON BOMBARD often found life very bad! He was born with an unbelievable aptitude for doing nothing and with an immoderate desire to follow this vocation. All effort, whether moral or physical, each movement accomplished for a purpose, appeared to him beyond his strength. As soon as he heard anyone speak of anything serious he became confused, his mind being incapable of tension or even attention.

The son of a novelty merchant of Caen, he glided along smoothly, as they said in the family, until he was twenty-five years of age. But as his parents were always nearer bankruptcy than fortune, he suffered greatly for want of money.

He was a tall, large, pretty youth with red whiskers, worn Norman fashion, of florid complexion, blue eyes, sensual and gay, corpulence

already apparent, and dressed with the swagger elegance of a provincial at a festival. He laughed, cried and gesticulated at the same time, displaying a storm of good nature with all the assurance of the seasoned traveler. He considered that life was made principally for joys and pleasures, and as soon as it became necessary to curb his noisy enjoyment he fell into a kind of chronic somnolence, being incapable of sadness.

His need for money harassed him until he formed the habit of repeating a phrase now celebrated in his circle of acquaintance: "For ten thousand francs a year I would become an executioner."

Now he went each year to Trouville to pass two weeks. He called this "spending the season." He would install himself at the house of his cousins who gave him the use of a room, and from the day of his arrival to that of his departure he would promenade along the boardwalk which extends along the great stretch of seashore.

He walked with an air of confidence, his hands in his pockets or crossed behind his back, always clothed in ample garments, with light waistcoats and showy cravats, his hat somewhat over his ear and a cheap cigar in one corner of his mouth.

He went along, brushing by the elegantly dressed women and eyeing contemptuously the merry men who were ready to make a disturbance for the sake of it, and seeking—seeking—what he was seeking.

He was after a wife, counting entirely upon his face and his physique. He said to himself: "Why the devil, in all the crowd that comes here, should I not be able to find my fate?" And he hunted with the scent of a dog in the chase, with the Norman scent, sure that he should recognize her, the woman who would make him rich, the moment he perceived her.

It was one Monday morning that he murmured: "Wait, wait, wait!" The weather was superb, one of those yellow-and-blue days of the month of July, when one might say that the sky wept from the heat. The vast shore covered with people, costumes, colors, had the air of a garden of women, and the fishing boats with their brown sails, almost immovable upon the blue water which reflected them upside down, seemed asleep under the great sun at ten o'clock in the morning. There they remained opposite the wooden pier, some near, some farther off, some still farther, as if overcome by a summer-day idleness, too indifferent to seek the high sea or even to return to port. And down there one could vaguely perceive in the mist the coast of Havre, showing two white points on its summit, the lighthouses of Sainte-Adresse.

He said to himself: "Wait, wait, wait!" For he had passed her now for the third time and perceived that she had noticed him, this mature woman, experienced and courageous, who was making a bid for his attention. He had noticed her before on the days preceding, because she seemed also in quest of someone. She was an Englishwoman, rather tall, a little thin, an audacious Englishwoman whom circumstances and much journeying had made a kind of man. Not bad, on the whole, walking along slowly with short steps, soberly and simply clothed, but wearing a queer sort of hat, as Englishwomen always do. She had rather pretty eyes, high cheekbones, a little red, teeth that were too long and always visible.

When he came to the pier he returned upon his steps to see if she would meet him again. He met her and she threw him a knowing glance, a glance which seemed to say: "Here I am!"

But how should he speak to her? He returned a fifth time, and when he was again face to face with her she dropped her umbrella. He threw himself forward, picked it up and presented it to her, saying: "Permit me, madame."

She responded: "Oh, you are very kind!"

And then they looked at each other. They knew nothing more to say. But she blushed. Then, becoming courageous, he said:

"We are having beautiful weather here."

And she answered: "Oh, delicious!"

And then they remained opposite each other, embarrassed, neither thinking of going away. It was she who finally had the audacity to ask: "Have you been about here long?"

He answered, laughing: "Oh yes, about as long as I care about it." Then brusquely he proposed: "Would you like to go down to the pier?" It is pretty there such days as this."

She simply said: "I should be much pleased."

And they walked along side by side, she with her harsh, direct allurements, he alluring her with his dandyism, which makes for rakishness later on.

Three months later the notables in the commercial world of Caen received one morning a square white card which said:

M. and Mme Prosper Bombard have the honor to announce the marriage of their son, M. Simon Bombard, to Mrs. Kate Robertson.

and on the other side:

Mrs. Kate Robertson has the honor of announcing her marriage to M. Simon Bombard.

They went to live in Paris. The fortune of the wife amounted to fifteen thousand francs a year income, free and clear. Simon wished to have four hundred francs a month for his personal expenses. He had to prove that his tenderness merited this amount; he did prove it easily and obtained what he asked for.

At first everything went well. Young Mme Bombard was no longer young, assuredly, and her freshness had undergone some wear, but she had a way of exacting things which made it impossible for anyone to refuse her. She would say with her grave, willful English accent: "Oh, Simon, now we must go to bed," which made Simon start toward the bed like a dog that had been ordered, "To your kennel." And she knew how to have her way by day and night in a manner there was no resisting.

She did not get angry; she made no scenes; she never cried; she never had the appearance of being irritated or hurt or even disturbed. She knew how to talk; that was all, and she spoke to the point and in a tone that admitted no contradiction.

More than once Simon was on the point of rebelling, but before the brief and imperious desires of this singular woman he found himself unable to stand out. Nevertheless, when the conjugal kisses began to be meager and monotonous and he had in his pocket what would bring him something greater, he paid for satiety, but with a thousand precautions.

Mme Bombard perceived all this without his surmising it, and one evening she announced to him that she had rented a house at Mantes where they would live in the future.

Then existence became harder. He tried various kinds of diversion which did not at all compensate for the conquests he had a taste for.

He fished with a line, learned how to tell the places which the gudgeon liked, which the roach and carp preferred, the favorite spots of the bream and the kinds of bait that divers fishes will take.

But in watching his bob as it trembled on the surface of the water, other visions haunted his mind. Then he became the friend of the chief of the office of the subprefect and the captain of the police, and they played whist of evenings at the Commerce Café, but his sorrowful eye would disrobe the queen of clubs or the lady of the diamonds, while the problem of the absent legs on these two-headed figures would bring up images suddenly that confused his thoughts.

Then he conceived a plan, a true Norman plan of deceit. He would have his wife take a maid who would be a convenience to him, not a beautiful girl, a coquette, adorned and showy, but a gawky woman, rough and strong-backed, who would not arouse suspicions and whom he would acquaint beforehand with his plans.

She was recommended to them by the director of the city farm, his accomplice and obliging friend, who guaranteed her under all relations and conditions. And Mme Bombard accepted with confidence the treasure they brought to her.

Simon was happy, happy with precaution, with fear and with unbelievable difficulties. He could never undress beyond the watchful eye of his wife, except for a few short moments from time to time, and then without tranquillity. He sought some plan, some stratagem, and he ended by finding one that suited him perfectly.

Mme Bombard, who had nothing to do, retired early, while Bombard, who played whist at the Commerce Café, returned each evening at half-past nine, exactly. He got Victorine to wait for him in the passageway of his house, under the vestibule steps in the darkness.

He only had five minutes or more, for he was always in fear of a surprise, but five minutes from time to time sufficed his ardor, and he slid a louis into the servant's hand, for he was generous in his pleasures, and she would quickly remount to her garret.

And he laughed, he triumphed all alone and repeated aloud, like King Midas' barber fishing for the goldfish from the reeds on the riverbank: "The mistress is safe within."

And the happiness of having Mme Bombard safely fixed within made up for him in great part for the imperfection and incompleteness of his conquest.

One evening he found Victorine waiting for him, as was her custom, but she appeared to him more lively, more animated than usual, and he remained perhaps ten minutes in the rendezvous in the corridor.

When he entered the conjugal chamber Mme Bombard was not there. He felt a cold chill run down his back and sank into a chair, tortured with fear.

She appeared with a candlestick in her hand. He asked, trembling: "You have been out?"

She answered quietly: "I went to the kitchen for a glass of water."

He forced himself to calm his suspicions of what she might have heard, but she seemed tranquil, happy, confident, and he was reassured.

When they entered the dining room for breakfast the next morning Victorine put the cutlets on the table. As she turned to go out Mme Bombard handed her a louis which she held up delicately between her two fingers and said to her with her calm, serious accent:

"Wait, my girl, here are twenty francs which I deprived you of last night. I wish to give them to you."

And the girl, amazed, took the piece of gold which she looked at with a stupid air, while Bombard, frightened, opened his eyes wide at his wife.

WOMAN'S WILES

"WOMEN?"

"Well, what do you say about women?"

"Well, there are no conjurers more subtle in taking us in at every available opportunity with or without reason, often for the sole pleasure of playing tricks on us. And they play these tricks with incredible simplicity, astonishing audacity, unparalleled ingenuity. They play tricks from morning till night, and they all do it—the most virtuous, the most upright, the most sensible of them. You may add that sometimes they are to some extent driven to do these things. Man has always idiotic fits of obstinancy and tyrannical desires. A husband is continually giving ridiculous orders in his own house. He is full of caprices; his wife plays on them even while she makes use of them for the purpose of deception. She persuades him that a thing costs so much because he would kick up a row if its price were higher. And she always extricates herself from the difficulty cunningly by means so simple and so sly that we gape with amazement when by chance we discover them. We say to ourselves in a stupefied state of mind, 'How is it we did not see this till now?'"

The man who uttered the words was an ex-minister of the Empire, the Comte de L——, thorough profligate, it was said, and a very accomplished gentleman. A group of young men were listening to him.

He went on:

"I was outwitted by an ordinary uneducated woman in a comic and thoroughgoing fashion. I will tell you about it for your instruction.

"I was at the time minister for foreign affairs, and I was in the habit of taking a long walk every morning in the Champs Elysées. It was the month of May; I walked along, sniffing in eagerly that sweet odor of budding leaves.

"Ere long I noticed that I used to meet every day a charming little woman, one of those marvelous, graceful creatures who bear the trade-mark of Paris. Pretty? Well, yes and no. Well made? No, better

than that: her waist was too slight, her shoulders too narrow, her breast too full, no doubt, but I prefer those exquisite human dolls to that great statuesque corpse, the Venus of Milo.

"And then this sort of woman trots along in an incomparable fashion, and the very rustle of her skirt fills the marrow of your bones with desire. She seemed to give me a side glance as she passed me. But these women give you all sorts of looks—you never can tell.

"One morning I saw her sitting on a bench with an open book between her hands. I came across and sat down beside her. Five minutes later we were friends. Then each day, after the smiling salutation: 'Good day, madame,' 'Good day, monsieur,' we begin to chat. She told me that she was the wife of a government clerk, that her life was a sad one, that in it pleasures were few and cares numerous, and a thousand other things.

"I told her who I was, partly through thoughtlessness and partly, perhaps, through vanity. She pretended to be much astonished.

"Next day she called at the Ministry to see me, and she came again there so often that the ushers, having their attention drawn to her appearance, used to whisper to one another as soon as they saw her the name with which they had christened her: 'Madame Léon'—that is, my Christian name.

"For three months I saw her every morning without growing tired of her for a second, so well was she able incessantly to give variety and piquancy to her physical attractiveness. But one day I saw that her eyes were bloodshot and glowing with suppressed tears, that she could scarcely speak, so much was she preoccupied with secret troubles.

"I begged of her, I implored of her, to tell me what was the cause of her agitation.

"She faltered out at length with a shudder: 'I am—I am *enceinte*!'

"And she burst out sobbing. Oh! I made a dreadful grimace, and I have no doubt I turned pale, as men generally do at hearing such a piece of news. You cannot conceive what an unpleasant stab you feel in your breast at the announcement of an unexpected paternity of this kind. But you are sure to know it sooner or later. So in my turn I gasped: 'But—but—you are married, are you not?'

"She answered: 'Yes, but my husband has been away in Italy for the last two months, and he will not be back for some time.'

"I was determined at any cost to get out of my responsibility.

"I said: 'You must go and join him immediately.'

"She reddened to her very temples and with downcast eyes murmured: 'Yes—but——' She either dared not or would not finish the sentence.

"I understood and I prudently inclosed in an envelope the expenses of her journey.

"Eight days later, she sent me a letter from Genoa. The following week I received one from Florence. Then letters reached me from Leghorn, Rome and Naples.

"She said to me:

"I am in good health, my dear love, but I am looking frightful. I would not care to have you see me till it is all over; you would not love me. My husband suspects nothing. As his business in this country will require him to stay there much longer, I will not return to France until after my confinement.

"And at the end of about eight months I received from Venice these few words:

"It is a boy.

"Some time after she suddenly entered my study one morning, fresher and prettier than ever, and flung herself into my arms. And our former connection was renewed.

"I left the Ministry, and she came to live in my house in the Rue de Grenelle. She often spoke to me about the child, but I scarcely listened to what she said about it; it did not concern me. Now and then I placed a rather large sum of money in her hand, saying: 'Put that by for him.'

"Two more years glided by, and she was more and more eager to tell me some news about the youngster—'about Léon.'

"Sometimes she would say in the midst of tears: 'You don't care about him; you don't even wish to see him. If you could know what grief you cause me!'

"At last I was so much harassed by her that I promised one day to go next morning to the Champs Elysées when she took the child there for an airing.

"But at the moment when I was leaving the house I was stopped by a sudden apprehension. Man is weak and foolish. What if I were to get fond of this tiny being of whom I was the father—my son?

"I had my hat on my head, my gloves in my hands. I flung down the gloves on my desk and my hat on a chair.

"No, decidedly I will not go; it is wiser not to go.'

"My door flew open. My brother entered the room. He handed me an anonymous letter he had received that morning:

"Warn the Comte de L——, your brother, that the little woman of the Rue Casette is impudently laughing at him. Let him make some inquiries about her.

"I had never told anybody about this intrigue, and I now told my brother the history of it from the beginning to the end. I added:

"For my part, I don't want to trouble myself any further about the matter, but will you, like a good fellow, go and find out what you can about her?"

"When my brother had left me I said to myself: 'In what way can she have deceived me? She has other lovers? What does it matter to me? She is young, fresh and pretty; I ask nothing more from her. She seems to love me, and as a matter of fact, she does not cost me much. Really, I don't understand this business.'

"My brother speedily returned. He had learned from the police all that was to be known about her husband: A clerk in the Home Department, of regular habits and good repute and, moreover, a thinking man, but married to a very pretty woman, whose expenses seemed somewhat extravagant for her modest position. That was all.

"Now my brother, having sought for her at her residence and finding that she was gone out, succeeded, with the assistance of a little gold, in making the doorkeeper chatter: 'Madame D——, a very worthy woman, and her husband a very worthy man, not proud, not rich, but generous.'

"My brother asked for the sake of saying something:

"How old is her little boy now?"

"Why, she has not got any little boy, monsieur."

"What? Little Léon?"

"No, monsieur, you are making a mistake."

"I mean the child she had while she was in Italy two years ago."

"She has never been in Italy, monsieur; she has not quitted the house she is living in for the last five years."

"My brother, in astonishment, questioned the doorkeeper anew, and then he pushed his investigation of the matter further. No child, no journey.

"I was prodigiously astonished but without clearly understanding the final meaning of this comedy.

"I want,' I said to him, 'to have my mind perfectly clear about the affair. I will ask her to come here tomorrow. You shall receive her instead of me. If she has deceived me you will hand her these ten thousand francs, and I will never see her again. In fact, I am beginning to find I have had enough of her.'

"Would you believe it? I had been grieved the night before because

I had a child by this woman, and I was now irritated, ashamed, wounded at having no more of her. I found myself free, released from all responsibility, from all anxiety, and yet I felt myself raging at the position in which I was placed.

"Next morning my brother awaited her in my study. She came in as quickly as usual, rushing toward him with outstretched arms, but when she saw who it was she at once drew back.

"He bowed and excused himself.

"I beg your pardon, madame, for being here instead of my brother, but he has authorized me to ask you for some explanations which he would find it painful to seek from you himself."

"Then fixing on her face a searching glance, he said abruptly:

"We know you have not a child by him."

"After the first moment of stupor she regained her composure, took a seat and gazed with a smile at this man who was sitting in judgment on her.

"She answered simply:

"No; I have no child."

"We know also that you have never been in Italy."

"This time she burst out laughing in earnest.

"No; I have never been in Italy."

"My brother, quite stunned, went on:

"The comte has requested me to give you this money and to tell you that it is broken off."

"She became serious again, calmly putting the money into her pocket and, in an ingenuous tone, asked:

"And I am not, then, to see the comte any more?"

"No, madame."

"She appeared to be annoyed, and in a passionless voice she said:

"So much the worse; I was very fond of him."

"Seeing that she had made up her mind on the subject so resolutely, my brother, smiling in his turn, said to her:

"Look here now, tell me why you invented all this long, tricky yarn, complicating it by bringing in the sham journey to Italy and the child?"

"She gazed at my brother in amazement, as if he had asked her a stupid question, and replied:

"Well, I declare! How spiteful you are! Do you believe a poor little woman of the people such as I am—nothing at all—could have for three years kept on my hands the Comte de L——, minister, a great personage, a man of fashion, wealthy and seductive, if she had not taken a little trouble about it? Now it is all over. So much the worse.

It couldn't last forever. Nonetheless, I succeeded in doing it for three years. You will say many things to him on my behalf.'

"She rose up. My brother continued questioning her:

"'But the child? You had one to show him?'

"'Certainly—my sister's child. She lent it to me. I'd bet it was she gave you the information.'

"'Good! And all those letters from Italy?'

"She sat down again so as to laugh at her ease.

"'Oh! Those letters—well, they were a bit of poetry. The comte was not a minister of foreign affairs for nothing.'

"'But—another thing?'

"'Oh! The other thing is my secret. I don't want to compromise anyone.'

"And, bowing to him with a rather mocking smile, she left the room without any emotion, an actress who had played her part to the end.'

And the Comte de L—— added by way of moral:

"So take care about putting your trust in that sort of turtledove!"

MOONLIGHT

MME JULIE ROUBÈRE was awaiting her elder sister, Mme Henriette Letore, who had just returned after a trip to Switzerland.

The Letore household had left nearly five weeks ago. Mme Henriette had allowed her husband to return alone to their estate in Calvados, where some matters of business required his attention, and came to spend a few days in Paris with her sister. Night came on. In the quiet parlor darkened by twilight shadows Mme Roubère was reading in an absent-minded fashion, raising her eyes whenever she heard a sound.

At last she heard a ring at the door, and presently her sister appeared, wrapped in a traveling cloak. And immediately, without any formal greeting, they clasped each other ardently, only desisting for a moment to begin embracing each other over again. Then they talked, asking questions about each other's health, about their respective families, and a thousand other things, gossiping, jerking out hurried, broken sentences and rushing about while Mme Henriette was removing her hat and veil.

It was now quite dark. Mme Roubère rang for a lamp, and as soon as it was brought in she scanned her sister's face and was on the point of embracing her once more. But she held back, scared and astonished

at the other's appearance. Around her temples Mme Letore had two long locks of white hair. All the rest of her hair was of a glossy, raven-black hue, but there alone, at each side of her head, ran, as it were, two silvery streams which were immediately lost in the black mass surrounding them. She was, nevertheless, only twenty-four years old, and this change had come on suddenly since her departure for Switzerland.

Without moving, Mme Roubère gazed at her in amazement, tears rising to her eyes, as she thought that some mysterious and terrible calamity must have fallen on her sister. She asked:

"What is the matter with you, Henriette?"

Smiling with a sad smile, the smile of one who is heartsick, the other replied:

"Why, nothing, I assure you. Were you noticing my white hair?"

But Mme Roubère impetuously seized her by the shoulders and, with a searching glance at her, repeated:

"What is the matter with you? Tell me, what is the matter with you. And if you tell me a falsehood I'll soon find it out."

They remained face to face, and Mme Henriette, who became so pale that she was near fainting, had two pearly tears at each corner of her drooping eyes.

Her sister went on asking:

"What has happened to you? What is the matter with you? Answer me!"

Then in a subdued voice the other murmured:

"I have—I have a lover."

And, hiding her forehead on the shoulder of her younger sister, she sobbed.

Then when she had grown a little calmer, when the heaving of her breast had subsided, she commenced to unbosom herself, as if to cast forth this secret from herself, to empty this sorrow of hers into a sympathetic heart.

Thereupon, holding each other's hands tightly grasped, the two women went over to a sofa in a dark corner of the room into which they sank, and the younger sister, passing her arm over the elder one's neck and drawing her close to her heart, listened.

"Oh! I recognize that there was no excuse for one; I do not understand myself, and since that day I feel as if I were mad. Be careful, my child, about yourself—be careful! If you only knew how weak we are, how quickly we yield, a moment of tenderness, one of those sud-

den fits of melancholy which steal into your soul, one of those longings to open your arms, to love, to embrace, which we all have at certain moments.

"You know my husband, and you know how fond of him I am, but he is mature and sensible and cannot even comprehend the tender vibrations of a woman's heart. He is always, always the same, always good, always smiling, always kind, always perfect. Oh! How I sometimes have wished that he would roughly clasp me in his arms, that he would embrace me with those slow, sweet kisses which make two beings intermingle, which are like mute confidences! How I wished that he was self-abandoned and even weak, so that he should have need of me, of my caresses, of my tears!

"This all seems very silly, but we women are made like that. How can we help it?

"And yet the thought of deceiving never came near me. Today it has happened, without love, without reason, without anything, simply because the moon shone one night on the Lake of Lucerne.

"During the month when we were traveling together my husband, with his calm indifference, paralyzed my enthusiasm, extinguished my poetic ardor. When we were descending the mountain paths at sunrise, when as the four horses galloped along with the diligence, we saw, in the transparent morning haze, valleys, woods, streams and villages. I clasped my hands with delight and said to him: 'What a beautiful scene, darling! Kiss me now!' He only answered, with a smile of chilling kindness, 'There is no reason why we should kiss each other because you like the landscape.'

"And his words froze me to the heart. It seems to me that when people love each other they ought to feel more moved by love than ever in the presence of beautiful scenes.

"Indeed, he prevented the effervescent poetry that bubbled up within me from gushing out. How can I express it? I was almost like a boiler filled with steam and hermetically sealed.

"One evening (we had been for four days staying in the Hotel de Fluelen), Robert, having got one of his sick headaches, went to bed immediately after dinner, and I went to take a walk all alone along the edge of the lake.

"It was a night such as one might read of in a fairy tale. The full moon showed itself in the middle of the sky; the tall mountains, with their snowy crests, seemed to wear silver crowns; the waters of the lake glittered with tiny rippling motions. The air was mild, with that kind of penetrating freshness which softens us till we seem to be swooning, to be deeply affected without any apparent cause. But how

sensitive, how vibrating, the heart is at such moments! How quickly it leaps up, and how intense are its emotions!

"I sat down on the grass and gazed at that vast lake, so melancholy and so fascinating, and a strange thing passed into me. I became possessed with an insatiable need of love, a revolt against the gloomy dullness of my life. What! would it never be my fate to be clasped in the arms of a man whom I loved on a bank like this under the glowing moonlight? Was I never, then, to feel on my lips those kisses so deep, delicious and intoxicating which lovers exchange on nights that seem to have been made by God for passionate embraces? Was I never to know such ardent, feverish love in the moonlit shadows of a summer's night?

"And I burst out weeping like a woman who has lost her reason. I heard some person stirring behind me. A man was intently gazing at me. When I turned my head round he recognized me and, advancing, said:

"You are weeping, madame?"

"It was a young barrister who was traveling with his mother and whom we had often met. His eyes had frequently followed me.

"I was so much confused that I did not know what answer to give or what to think of the situation. I told him I felt ill.

"He walked on by my side in a natural and respectful fashion and began talking to me about what we had seen during our trip. All that I had felt he translated into words; everything that made me thrill he understood perfectly, better even than I did myself. And all of a sudden he recited some verses of Alfred de Musset. I felt myself choking, seized with indescribable emotion. It seemed to me that the mountains themselves, the lake, the moonlight, were singing to me about things ineffably sweet.

"And it happened, I don't know how, I don't know why, in a sort of hallucination.

"As for him, I did not see him again till the morning of his departure.

"He gave me his card!"

And, sinking into her sister's arms, Mme Letore broke into groans—almost into shrieks.

Then Mme Roubère, with a self-contained and serious air, said very gently:

"You see, Sister, very often it is not a man that we love, but love. And your real lover that night was the moonlight."

DOUBTFUL HAPPINESS

I CAN NEITHER TELL you the name of the country nor of the man. It was far, far from here, upon a hot, fertile coast. We followed, since morning, the shore and the wheat fields and the sea covered with the sun. Flowers grew down very near the waves, the light waves, so sweet and sleepy. It was very warm, but a gentle heat, perfumed with the fat, humid, fruitful earth; one could believe that he was breathing germs.

I had been told that this evening I would find hospitality in the house of a Frenchman who lived at the end of the promontory in a grove of orange trees. Who was he? I do not know yet. He had arrived one morning, ten years before this, bought the land, planted his vines and sown his seed; he had worked, had this man, with passion and fury. Month after month and year after year he had added to his domains, making the fertile, virgin soil yield without ceasing and amassing a fortune by his indefatigable labor.

It was said that he worked constantly. Up with the dawn, going through his fields until night, superintending everything without rest, he seemed harassed by a fixed idea, tortured by an insatiable desire for money which nothing could distract or appease.

Now he seemed to be very rich.

The sun was setting when I reached his dwelling. This dwelling was at the end of a point in the midst of orange trees. It was a large, square house, very simple, overlooking the sea.

As I approached, a large, bearded man appeared in the doorway. Having saluted him, I asked for shelter for the night. He extended his hand and said, smiling:

"Enter, sir, you are at home."

He led me to a room, gave some orders to a servant with the perfect ease and good grace of a man of the world, then he left me, saying:

"We will dine when you are ready to come down."

We dined, tête-à-tête, upon a terrace opposite the sea. At first I spoke of his country, so rich, so far away, so little known! He smiled, answering in an abstracted way:

"Yes, this is a pretty country. But no country pleases one much when it is far from those they love."

"You regret France?"

"I—I long for Paris."

"Why not return there?"

"Oh! I am going to return there."

And gradually we began to talk of the French world, of the boulevards and of the many features of Paris. He asked me about men he had known, cities, names, all of them familiar names upon the vaudeville stage.

"Who does one see at Tortoni's these days?"

"The same ones, except the dead."

I looked at him with marked interest, pursued by some vague remembrance. Certainly I had seen that head somewhere! But where? And when? He seemed fatigued, although vigorous, sad, though resolute. His great blond beard fell upon his breast, and sometimes he would take it near his chin and draw it through his closed hand, slipping it along to the very end. He was a little bald but had thick eyebrows and a heavy mustache which mingled with the hair of his beard.

Behind us the sun was disappearing in the sea, throwing upon the coast a cloud of fire. The orange trees, in flower, exhaled a powerful, delicious fragrance on the evening air. Seeing nothing but me and fixing his look upon me, he seemed to discover in my eyes, to see at the depth of my soul, the well-known, much loved image of the broad walk, so far away, that extends from the Madeleine to the Rue Drouot.

"Do you know Bourtellet?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly."

"Is he much changed?"

"Yes, he is all white."

"And the Ridamie?"

"Always the same."

"And the women? Tell me about the women. Let us see. Did you know Suzanne Verner?"

"Yes, very well, to the end."

"Ah! And Sophie Astier?"

"Dead!"

"Poor girl! Can it be—— Did you know——"

He was suddenly silent. Then in a changed voice, his face growing pale, he continued:

"No, it is better not to speak of her; it disturbs me so."

Then as if to change the trend of his thought, he rose and said:

"Do you wish to go in?"

"I am willing to go." And I followed him into the house.

The rooms downstairs were enormous, bare, sad, and seemed abandoned. Some glass dishes were set upon the table by the tawny-skinned servants who constantly roamed around this dwelling. Two guns hung upon two nails on the wall, and in the corners were to be seen some spades, some fishlines, dried palm leaves and objects of

every kind, placed there at random by those entering, that they might find them at hand should they chance to have need of them on going out.

My host smiled.

"This is a lodge, or rather the lodging place of an exile," he said, "but my chamber is more as it should be. Let us go in there."

I thought, on entering, that I was in a curiosity shop, so filled was the room with all kinds of things, things disconnected, strange and varied, that one felt to be souvenirs of something. Upon the walls were two pretty engravings of well-known paintings, some stuffs, some arms, swords, pistols; then, in the middle of the principal panel, a square of white satin in a gold frame.

Surprised, I approached to look at it, when I perceived a pin which held a hair in the middle of the shining silk.

My host placed his hand on my shoulder and said, smiling:

"That is the only thing that I see here and the only thing I have seen for ten years. Monsieur Prudhomme exclaims: 'This sword is the most beautiful day in my life.' But I say: 'This pin is all of my life.'"

I sought for a commonplace phrase and ended by saying:

"You have suffered through some woman?"

He replied brusquely: "You may say I have suffered miserably, but come out on my balcony. A name has suddenly come to my lips that I have not dared to pronounce, because if you had answered 'dead' as you did when I spoke of Sophie Astier, my brain would be on fire, even today."

"We were upon a large balcony where we could see two gulfs, one on the right and the other on the left, shut in by high, gray mountains. It was the hour of twilight, when the sun, entirely out of sight, no longer lights the earth, except by reflection from the sky.

He continued: "Do you know if Jeanne de Limours still lives?"

His eye, fixed on mine, was full of trembling anxiety. I smiled and answered:

"Yes indeed, and prettier than ever."

"You know her?"

"Yes."

He hesitated. Then asked: "Completely?"

"No."

He took my hand. "Tell me about her," he said.

"I have nothing to tell; she is one of the most charming women, or rather girls, in Paris, and the most courted. She leads an agreeable, princesslike existence; that is all."

He murmured: "I love her," as if he had said: "I am going to die." Then, brusquely: "Ah! For three years that was a frightful but deli-

cious existence of ours. I was very near killing her five or six times, and she tried to put out my eyes with that pin you were just looking at. Wait! Do you see the little white point under my left eye? That shows how we loved each other! How can I explain this passion? You could never comprehend it.

"There should be such a thing as a simple love, born of the force of two hearts and two souls, and assuredly there is such a thing as an atrocious love, cruelly torturing, born of the invincible rapture of two beings totally unlike, who detest while they adore each other.

"This girl ruined me in three years. I possessed four millions which she squandered in her calm way, tranquilly, and destroyed with a sweet smile which seemed to fall from her eyes upon her lips.

"You know her? Then you know that there is something irresistible about her! What is it? I do not know. Is it those gray eyes, whose look enters into you and remains there like the barb of an arrow? Or is it rather that sweet smile, indifferent and seductive, which stays on her face like a mask? Her slow manner penetrates little by little and takes hold of you like a perfume, as does her tall figure, which seems to balance itself as she passes, for she glides instead of walking, and her sweet voice, which drags a little and is so pretty that it seems to be the music of her smile; her gestures, too, her always moderate gestures, always right, which intoxicate the eye, so harmonious are they.

"For three years I saw only her upon the earth! How I suffered! Because she deceived me as well as everybody else. Why? For no reason, only for the sake of deceiving. And when I found it out and accused her of being a street girl, a bad woman, she said tranquilly: 'Well, we are not married, are we?'

"Since I have come here I have thought much about her and have succeeded in understanding her; that girl is Manon Lescaut over again. Manon could never love without deceiving, and for her love, pleasure and money were all."

He was silent. Then after some minutes he added:

"When I had squandered my last sou for her she simply said to me: 'You understand, my dear, that I cannot live on air and weather. I love you very much; I love you more than anyone, but I must live. Misery and I can never dwell in the same house.'

"And if I could only tell you what an atrocious life I led by her side! Whenever I looked at her I had as much desire to kill her as I had to embrace her. Whenever I looked at her there came to me a furious desire to open my arms, press her to me until I strangled her. There was something about her, behind her eyes, something perfidious and unseizable which made me furious against her, and perhaps it

was for that very reason that I loved her so much. In her the Feminine, the odious, frightful Feminine, was more prominent than in any other woman. She was charged and surcharged with it, as with a venomous fluid. She was Woman, more than anyone else has ever been.

"And whenever I went out with her she would cast her eyes over all men in such a fashion that she seemed to give herself to each one with only a look. This exasperated me but attached me more strongly to her, nevertheless. This creature belonged to everybody from merely passing through the street, in spite of me, in spite of herself, from her very nature, although the allurements was most modest and sweet. Do you understand?"

"And what torment! At the theater, in a restaurant, it seemed to me that everyone possessed her before my eyes. And whenever I left her alone others did, in fact, possess her.

"It is ten years now since I saw her, and I love her now more than ever."

Night had spread over the earth. A powerful perfume of orange flowers was in the air.

I said to him: "Will you try to see her again?"

He answered: "Surely! I have here now, in money and land, seven or eight hundred thousand francs. When the million is completed I shall sell all and set out. With that I can have one year with her, one good, entire year. And then—adieu; my life will be finished."

I asked: "And after that?"

"After that," he answered, "I don't know. It will be finished. Perhaps I shall ask her to take me as *valet de chambre*."

HUMILIATION

THE TWO YOUNG WOMEN had the appearance of being buried in a bed of flowers. They were alone in an immense landau filled with bouquets like a giant basket. Upon the seat before them were two small hamper full of Nice violets, and upon the bearskin which covered their knees was a heap of roses, gillyflowers, marguerites, tuberose and orange flowers, bound together with silk ribbons, which seemed to crush the two delicate bodies, only allowing to appear above the spread-out, perfumed bed the shoulders, arms and a little of their bodices, one of which was blue and the other lilac.

The coachman's whip bore a sheath of anemones; the horses' heads were decorated with wallflowers; the spokes of the wheels were clothed in mignonette, and in place of lanterns, there were two round, enor-

mous bouquets, which seemed like the two eyes of this strange, rolling, flowery beast.

The landau went along Antibes Street at a brisk trot, preceded, followed and accompanied by a crowd of other garlanded carriages full of women concealed under a billow of violets. For it was the Flower Festival at Cannes.

They arrived at the Foncière Boulevard where the battle took place. The whole length of the immense avenue, a double line of bedecked equipages was going and coming, like a ribbon without end. They threw flowers from one to the other. Flowers passed in the air like balls, hit the fair faces, hovered and fell in the dust where an army of street urchins gathered them.

A compact crowd, clamorous but orderly, looked on, standing in rows upon the sidewalks and held in place by policemen on horseback who passed along, pushing back the curious brutally with their feet, in order that the villains might not mingle with the rich.

Now the people in the carriages recognized each other, called to each other and bombarded one another with roses. A chariot full of pretty young women, clothed in red like devils, attracted and held all eyes. One gentleman, who resembled the portraits of Henry IV, threw repeatedly, with joyous ardor, a huge bouquet retained by an elastic. At the threat of the blow the women lowered their heads and hid their eyes, but the gracious projectile only described a curve and again returned to its master, who immediately threw it again to a new face.

The two young women emptied their arsenal with full hands and received a shower of bouquets; then after an hour of battle, a little wearied at the last, they ordered the coachman to take the road to the Juan Gulf, which skirts the sea.

The sun disappeared behind the Esterel, outlining in black upon a background of fire the lacy silhouette of the stretched-out mountain. The calm sea was spread out blue and clear as far as the horizon, where it mingled with the sky and with the squadron anchored in the middle of the gulf, having the appearance of a troop of monstrous beasts, immovable upon the water, apocalyptic animals, humpbacked and clothed in coats of mail, capped with thin masts like plumes and with eyes that lighted up when night came on.

The young women, stretched out under the fur robe, looked upon it languidly. Finally one of them said:

"How delicious these evenings are! Everything seems good. Is it not so, Margot?"

The other replied: "Yes, it is good. But there is always something lacking."

"What is it? For my part, I am completely happy. I have need of nothing."

"Yes? You think so, perhaps. But whatever well-being surrounds our bodies, we always desire something more—for the heart."

Said the other, smiling: "A little love?"

"Yes."

They were silent, looking straight before them; then the one called Marguerite said: "Life does not seem supportable to me without that. I need to be loved, if only by a dog. And we are all so, whatever you may say, Simone."

"No, no, my dear. I prefer not to be loved at all than to be loved by no one of importance. Do you think, for example, that it would be agreeable to me to be loved by—by——"

She looked for someone by whom she could possibly be loved, casting her eyes over the neighboring country. Her eyes, after having made the tour of the whole horizon, fell upon the two metal buttons shining on the coachman's back, and she continued, laughing, "By my coachman?"

Mlle Marguerite scarcely smiled as she replied:

"I can assure you it is very amusing to be loved by a domestic. This has happened to me two or three times. They roll their eyes so queerly that one is dying to laugh. Naturally, the more one is loved, the more severe she becomes, since otherwise, one puts herself in the way of being made ridiculous for some very slight cause, if anyone happened to observe it."

Mlle Simone listened, her look fixed straight before her; than she declared:

"No, decidedly, the heart of my valet at my feet would not appear to me sufficient. But tell me how you perceived that you were loved."

"I perceived it in them as I do in other men; they become so stupid!"

"But others do not appear so stupid to me when they are in love."

"Idiots, my dear, incapable of chatting, of answering, of comprehending anything."

"And you? What effect did it have on you to be loved by a domestic? Were you moved—flattered?"

"Moved? No. Flattered? Yes, a little. One is always flattered by the love of a man, whoever he may be."

"Oh, now, Margot!"

"Yes, my dear. Wait! I will tell you a singular adventure that happened to me. You will see what curious things take place among us in such cases."

"It was four years ago in the autumn, when I found myself without a maid. I had tried five or six, one after the other, all of them incom-

petent, and almost despaired of finding one, when I read in the advertisements of a newspaper of a young girl knowing how to sew, embroider and dress hair, who was seeking a place and could furnish the best of references. She could also speak English.

"I wrote to the address given, and the next day the person in question presented herself. She was rather tall, thin, a little pale, with a very timid air. She had beautiful black eyes, a charming color, and she pleased me at once. I asked for her references; she gave me one written in English, because she had come, she said, from the house of Lady Ryswell, where she had been for ten years.

"The certificate attested that the girl was returning to France of her own will and that she had nothing to reproach her for during her long service with her, except a little of the *French coquettishness*.

"The modest turn of the English phrase made me smile a little, and I engaged the maid immediately. She came to my house the same day; she called herself Rose.

"At the end of a month I adored her. She was a treasure, a pearl, a phenomenon.

"She could dress my hair with exquisite taste; she could flute the lace of a cap better than the best of the professionals, and she could make frocks. I was amazed at her ability. Never had I been so well served.

"She dressed me rapidly with an astonishing lightness of hand. I never felt her fingers upon my skin, and nothing is more disagreeable to me than contact with a maid's hand. I immediately got into excessively idle habits, so pleasant was it to let her dress me from head to foot, from chemise to gloves—this tall, timid girl, always blushing a little and never speaking. After my bath she would rub me and massage me while I slept a little while on my divan; indeed, I came to look upon her more as a friend in poorer circumstances than a servant.

"One morning the *concierge*, with some show of mystery, said he wished to speak to me. I was surprised but let him enter. He was an old soldier, once orderly for my husband.

"He appeared to hesitate at what he was going to say. Finally he said stammeringly: 'Madame, the police captain for this district is downstairs.'

"I asked: 'What does he want?'

"'He wants to search the house.'

"Certainly the police are necessary, but I do detest them. I never can make it seem a noble profession. And I answered, irritated as well as wounded:

"'Why search here? For what purpose? There has been no burglary?'

"He answered:

"He thinks that a criminal is concealed somewhere here."

"I began to be a little afraid and ordered the police captain to be brought that I might have some explanation. He was a man rather well brought up and decorated with the Legion of Honor. He excused himself, asked my pardon, then asserted that I had among my servants a convict!

"I was thunderstruck and answered that I could vouch for every one of them and that I would make a review of them for his satisfaction.

"There is Peter Courtin, an old soldier."

"It was not he.

"The coachman, Francis Pingau, a peasant, son of my father's farmer."

"It was not he.

"A stableboy, also from Champagne and also a son of peasants I had known, and no more except the footman, whom you have seen."

"It was not any of them.

"Then, sir, you see that you have been deceived."

"Pardon me, madame, but I am sure I am not deceived. As he has not at all the appearance of a criminal, will you have the goodness to have all your servants appear here before you and me, all of them?"

"I hesitated at first, then I yielded, summoning all my people, men and women.

"He looked at them all for an instant, then declared:

"This is not all."

"Your pardon, sir," I replied; "this is all, except my own maid who could not possibly be confounded with a convict."

"He asked: 'Could I see her too?'"

"Certainly."

"I rang and Rose appeared immediately. Scarcely had she entered when he gave a signal, and two men, whom I had not seen, concealed behind the door, threw themselves upon her, seized her hands and bound them with cords.

"I uttered a cry of fury and was going to try and defend her. The captain stopped me:

"This girl, madame, is a man who calls himself John Nicholas Lecapet, condemned to death in 1879 for assassination preceded by violation. His sentence was changed to life imprisonment. He escaped four months ago. We have been on the search for him ever since."

"I was dismayed, struck dumb. I could not believe it. The policeman continued, laughing:

"I can only give you one proof. His right arm is tattooed."

"His sleeve was rolled up. It was true. The policeman added, certainly in bad taste:

"Doubtless you will be satisfied without the other proofs."

"And he led away my maid!"

"Well, if you will believe it, the feeling which was uppermost in me was that of anger at having been played with in this way, deceived and made ridiculous; it was not shame at having been dressed, undressed, handled and touched by this man, but—a—profound humiliation—the humiliation of a woman. Do you understand?"

"No, not exactly."

"Let us see. Think a minute. He had been condemned—for violation, this young man—and that—that humiliated me—there! Now do you understand?"

And Mlle Simone did not reply. She looked straight before her, with her eyes singularly fixed upon the two shining buttons of the livery and with that sphinx's smile that women have sometimes.

THE WEDDING NIGHT

MY DEAR GENEVIEVE, you ask me to tell you about my wedding journey. How do you think I dare? Ah! Sly one, who had nothing to tell me, who even allowed me to guess at nothing—but there! Nothing from nothing!

Now you have been married eighteen months, yes, eighteen months, you, my best friend, who formerly said you could conceal nothing from me, and you had not the charity to warn me! If you had only given the hint! If you had only put me on my guard! If you had put one little simple suspicion in my soul, you might have hindered me from making the egregious blunder for which I still blush and which my husband will laugh at until his death. You alone are responsible for it! I have rendered myself frightfully ridiculous forever; I have committed one of those errors of which the memory is never effaced—and by your fault, wicked one! Oh! If I had known!

Wait! I take courage from writing and have decided to tell you all. But promise me not to laugh too much. And do not expect a comedy. It is a drama.

You recall my marriage. I was to start the same evening on my wedding journey. Certainly I did not at all resemble Paulette, whom Gyp tells us about in that droll account of her spiritual romance called *About Marriage*. And if my mother had said to me, as Mme d'Hautretan did to her daughter: "Your husband will take you in his arms—and——" I should certainly not have responded as Paulette

did, laughing: "Go no farther, Mamma, I know all that as well as you."

As for me, I knew nothing at all, and Mamma, my poor mamma who is always frightened, dared not broach the delicate subject.

Well then, at five o'clock in the evening, after the collation, they told us that the carriage was waiting. The guests had gone; I was ready. I can still hear the noise of the trunks on the staircase and the blowing of Papa's nose, which seemed to indicate that he was weeping. In embracing me the poor man said: "Good courage!" as if I were going to have a tooth pulled. As for Mamma, she was a fountain. My husband urged me to hasten these painful adieux, and I was myself all in tears, although very happy. That is not easy to explain but is entirely true. All at once I felt something pulling at my dress. It was Bijou, wholly forgotten since morning. The poor beast was saying adieu to me after his fashion. This gave my heart a little blow, and I felt a great desire to embrace my dog. I seized him (you remember he is as large as a fist) and began to devour him with kisses. I love to caress animals. It gives me a sweet pleasure, causing a kind of delicious shiver.

As for him, he was like a mad creature; he waved his paws, licked me and nibbled, as he does when he is perfectly content. Suddenly he took my nose in his teeth, and I felt that he had really bitten me. I uttered a little cry and put the dog down. He had bitten, although only in play. Everybody was disturbed. They brought water, vinegar and some pieces of linen. My husband himself attended to it. It was nothing, after all, but three little holes which his teeth had made. At the end of five minutes the blood was stopped and we went away.

It had been decided that we should go on a journey through Normandy for about six weeks.

That evening we arrived at Dieppe. When I say evening, I mean midnight.

You know how I love the sea. I declared to my husband that I could not retire until I had seen it. He appeared very contrary. I asked him, laughing, if he was sleepy.

He answered: "No, my dear, but you must understand that I would like to be alone with you."

I was surprised. "Alone with me?" I replied. "But you have been alone with me all the way from Paris in the train."

He laughed, "Yes—but—in the train—that is not the same thing as being in our room."

I would not give up. "Oh well," I said, "we shall be alone on the beach, and that is all there is to it!"

Decidedly he was not pleased. He said: "Very well; as you wish."

The night was magnificent, one of those nights which brings grand,

vague ideas to the soul—more sensations than thoughts, perhaps—that brings a desire to open the arms as if they were wings and embrace the heavens, but how can I express it? One always feels that these unknown things can be comprehended.

There was a dreaminess, a poesy in the air, a happiness of another kind than that of earth, a sort of infinite intoxication which comes from the stars, the moon, the silver, glistening water. These are the best moments of life. They are a glimpse of a different existence, an embellished, delicious existence; they are the revelation of what could be, of what will be, perhaps.

Nevertheless, my husband appeared impatient to return. I said to him: "Are you cold?"

"No."

"Then look at the little boat down there which seems asleep on the water. Could anything be better than this? I would willingly remain here until daybreak. Tell me, shall we wait and see aurora?"

He seemed to think that I was mocking him and very soon took me back to the hotel by force! If I had known! Oh, the poor creature!

When we were once alone I felt ashamed, constrained, without knowing why. I swear it. Finally I made him go into the bathroom while I got into bed.

Oh, my dear, how can I go further? Well, here it is! He took, without doubt, my extreme innocence for mischief, my extreme simplicity for profligacy, my confident, credulous abandon for some kind of tactics and paid no regard to the delicate management that is necessary in order to make a soul wholly unprepared comprehend and accept such mysteries.

All at once I believe he lost his head. Then fear seized me; I asked him if he wished to kill me. When terror invades, one does not reason or think further; one is mad. In one second I had imagined frightful things. I thought of various stories in the newspapers, of mysterious crimes, of all the whispered tales of young girls married to miserable men! I fought, repulsed him, was overcome with fright. I even pulled a wisp of hair from his mustache and, relieved by this effort, I arose, shouting: "Help! help!" I ran to the door, drew the bolts and hurried, nearly naked, downstairs.

Other doors opened. Men in night apparel appeared with lights in their hands. I fell into the arms of one of them, imploring his protection. He made an attack upon my husband.

I knew no more about it. They fought and they cried; then they laughed, but laughed in a way you could never imagine. The whole house laughed, from the cellar to the garret. I heard in the corridors and in the rooms about us explosions of gaiety. The kitchenmaids

laughed under the roof, and the bellboy was in contortions on his bench in the vestibule.

Think of it! In a hotel!

Soon I found myself alone with my husband, who made me some summary explanations, as one explains a surgical operation before it is undertaken. He was not at all content. I wept until daylight, and we went away at the opening of the doors.

That is not all. The next day we arrived at Pourville, which is only an embryo station for baths. My husband overwhelmed me with little attentions and tender care. After a first misunderstanding he appeared enchanted. Ashamed and much cast down over my adventure of the evening before, I was also amiable as could be, and docile. But you cannot figure the horror, the disgust, almost the hatred that Henry inspired in me, when I knew the infamous secret that they conceal from young girls. I was in despair, as sad as death, mindful of everything and harassed by the need of being near my poor parents. The next day after we arrived at Etretat. All the bathers were in a flurry of excitement. A young woman had been bitten by a little dog and had just died of rabies. A great shiver ran down my back when I heard this story told at the hotel table. It seemed to me immediately that I was suffering in the nose, and I had strange feelings all along my limbs.

That night I could not sleep; I had completely forgotten my husband. What if I were going to die, too, from rabies? I asked for some details the next day from the proprietor of the hotel. He gave me some frightful ones. I passed the day in walking upon the shore. I thought I could no longer speak. Hydrophobia! What a horrible death!

Henry asked me: "What is the matter? You seem sad."

I answered: "Oh! Nothing! Nothing!"

My staring eyes were fixed upon the sea without seeing it, upon farms, upon the fields, without my ever being able to say what came under my gaze. For nothing in the world would I have confessed the thought that tortured me. Some pain, true pain was felt in my nose. I wished to return.

As soon as I was back in the hotel I shut myself up in order to examine the wound. There was nothing to be seen. Nevertheless, I could not doubt that it was working me great harm. I wrote immediately to my mother, a short letter which probably sounded strange. I asked an immediate reply to some insignificant questions. After having signed my name, I wrote: "Especially, do not forget to give me some news of Bijou."

The next day I could not eat, but I refused to see a physician. All day long I remained seated upon the beach, looking at the bathers in

the water. They came, the thin and the stout, all hideous in their frightful costumes, but I never thought of laughing. I thought: "They are happy, these people! They have not been bitten! They are going to live! They have nothing to fear. They can amuse themselves at will because they are at peace!"

At that instant I carried my hand to my nose, touching it; was it not swollen? And soon I entered the hotel, shut myself in and looked at it in the glass. Oh, it had changed color. I should die now very soon.

That evening I felt all at once a sort of tenderness for my husband, a tenderness of despair. He appeared good to me; I leaned upon his arm. Twenty times I was on the point of telling him my distressing secret but ended in keeping silent.

He abused odiously my listlessness and the weakness of my soul. I had not the force to resist him, or even the will. I would bear all, suffer all!

The next day I received a letter from my mother. She replied to my questions but said not a word about Bijou. I immediately thought: "He is dead and they are concealing it from me." I wished to run to the telegraph office and send a dispatch. One thought stopped me: "If he really is dead they will not tell me." I then resigned myself to two more days of anguish. I wrote again. I asked them to send me the dog, for diversion, because I was a little lonesome.

A trembling fit took me in the afternoon. I could not raise a full glass without spilling half. The state of my soul was lamentable. I escaped from my husband at twilight and ran to the church. I prayed a long time. On returning I felt anew the pains in my nose and consulted a druggist whose shop was lighted. I spoke to him as if one of my friends had been bitten, asking his advice in the matter. He was an amiable man, very obliging. He advised me freely. But I forgot to notice what he said; my mind was so troubled. I only remember this: "Purging is often recommended." I bought many bottles of I know not what, under pretext of sending them to my friend.

The dogs that I met filled me with horror, creating in me a desire to flee at top of my speed. It seemed to me many times, also, that I had a desire to bite them. My night was horribly disturbed. My husband profited by it.

The next day I received a response from my mother. "Bijou," she said, "is very well, but it would expose him too much to send him alone on a railroad train." Then they would not send him to me. He was dead.

I could not yet sleep. As for Henry, he snored. He awoke many times. I was annihilated.

The next day I took a bath in the sea. I was almost overcome in entering the water; I was so frightfully cold. I was more than ever shocked by this frigid sensation. I trembled in every limb but felt no more pain in the nose.

By chance they presented me to the medical inspector of the baths, a charming man. I led up to my subject with extreme skill. I then said to him that my little dog had bitten me several days before and asked him what was necessary to be done if we discovered any inflammation. He laughed and answered: "In your situation, madame, I see only one remedy, which would be for you to make a new nose."

And as I did not comprehend, he added: "Your husband will see to that." And I was no better informed on leaving him than I was before.

Henry that evening seemed very gay, very happy. We went to the casino, but he did not wait for the end of the play before proposing to me to return. As there was nothing of interest to me, I followed him. But I could not remain in bed; all my nerves were unstrung and vibrating. Neither could he sleep. He embraced me, caressed me, became all sweetness and tenderness, as if he had finally guessed how much I was suffering. I accepted his caresses without even comprehending them or thinking about them.

But suddenly an extraordinary, fearful crisis seized me. I uttered a frightful cry, pushed back my husband who took hold of me, ran into my room and began to beat my head and face against the door. It was rage! Horrible rage! I was lost!

Henry raised me up, himself frightened and trying to understand the trouble. I kept silent. I was resigned now. I awaited death. I knew that after some hours of respite another crisis would seize me, even to the last which would be mortal.

I allowed them to put me in the bed. At the point of day the irritating obsessions of my husband caused a new paroxysm, which was longer than the first. I had a desire to tear and bite and howl; it was terrible and, nevertheless, not so painful as I had believed.

Toward eight o'clock in the morning I slept for the first time in four nights. At eleven o'clock a beloved voice awoke me. It was Mamma, whom my letters had frightened and who had hastened to see me. She had in her hand a great basket, from whence came some little barks. I seized it, foolish in hope. I opened it, and Bijou jumped upon the bed, embraced me, gamboled about, rolled himself upon my pillow, frenzied with joy.

Ah well, my dearie, you may believe me if you will; I did not comprehend all until the next day. Oh, the imagination, how it works! And to think that I believed—— Tell me, was it not too foolish?

I have never confessed to anyone, you will understand why, the

tortures of those four days. Think, if my husband had known! He has teased enough already about my adventures at Pourville. For my part, I cannot be too angry at his jests.

I am done. We have to accustom ourselves to everything in life.

THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER

QUARTERMASTER VARAJOU had obtained permission to pass eight days with his sister, Mme Padoie. Varajou, who was in garrison at Rennes and led a jolly life there, finding himself high and dry with his family, had written to his sister that he would devote his week of liberty to her. Not that he loved Mme Padoie so much, for she was a little moralist, devout and always irritating, but he was in need of money, in great need, and he remembered that of all his relatives, the Padoies were the only ones from whom he had never borrowed.

Father Varajou, an old horticulturist of Angers, now retired from business, had closed his purse to his rake of a son and had scarcely seen him for ten years. His daughter had married Padoie, a former employee of the Treasury, who had since become collector at Vannes.

Varajou, then, on getting out of the train, took himself to the house of his brother-in-law. He found him in his office, in process of discussion with some Breton peasants of the neighborhood. Padoie raised himself from his chair, extended his hand across the table, which was covered with papers, and said: "Take a seat; I will be with you in a moment." Then he seated himself again and continued his discussion.

The peasants could not understand his explanations; the collector could not comprehend their reasoning; he spoke French; they spoke Breton, and the deputy who acted as interpreter seemed not to understand anyone.

It was long, very long. Varajou looked at his brother-in-law, thinking: "What an idiot!" Padoie must have been about fifty. He was tall, thin, bony, slow, hairy, with his eyebrows arching until they made spears of hair above his eyes. He wore on his head a velvet cap ornamented with gold braid, and his look had the tameness which his action showed. His words, his gestures, his thoughts, were all slow. Varajou kept repeating: "What an idiot!"

He was himself one of those noisy brawlers for whom life has no greater pleasures than those of the café and the public women. Outside these two poles of existence he understood nothing. Boasting, blustering, full of disdain for everybody, he despised the whole universe from the height of his ignorance. When he had said: "What a

devil of a holiday!" he had expressed the highest degree of admiration of which his mind was capable.

Padoie, having finished with his peasants, turned to him and asked: "You are well?"

"Not bad, as you see. And you?"

"Very well, thank you. It is amiable of you to think of coming to see us."

"Oh! I have thought of it for a long time, but you know in the military profession one doesn't have much liberty."

"Oh! I know, I know, and that is why it is very amiable of you."

"And Josephine is well?"

"Yes, yes, thank you; you shall see her very soon."

"Where is she?"

"She has gone to pay some visits; we have so many relatives here, and this is a very exacting, proper town."

"I have no doubt of it."

Then the door opened and Mme Padoie appeared. She went toward her brother without eagerness, held up her cheek and asked:

"Have you been here long?"

"No, scarcely half an hour."

"Ah! I thought the train would be late. If you are ready, come into the parlor."

They passed into a neighboring room, leaving Padoie to his accounts and his collections. When they were alone she said:

"I have heard of some of your fine actions."

"What, for instance?"

"It appears that you have been conducting yourself like a black-guard, that you get tipsy and have been getting into debt."

He appeared very much astonished. "If?" he said. "Never in my life."

"Oh, you needn't deny it; I know all about it."

He still tried to defend himself, but she closed his mouth with so violent a lecture that he was forced to silence.

Then she said: "We dine at six o'clock; you are free until dinner. I cannot ask your company because I, not unfortunately, have some things to do." Left alone, he hesitated between sleeping and taking a walk. He looked for a door leading to his room and found one to the street. He decided in favor of the street.

He began to wander around slowly, his sword hitting against his legs, through the sad Breton town, so sleepy, so calm, so dead, that on the border of its inner sea they call it "The Morbihan." He looked at the little gray houses, the few passers, the empty shops, and said to himself: "Not gay, surely, or amusing, is Vannes. A sad idea, coming here!"

He sought the port, so dreary, returned by a solitary, desolate boulevard and was back before five o'clock. Then he threw himself upon his bed to sleep until dinner.

The maid woke him by knocking on the door and saying: "Dinner is served, sir!"

He descended. In the humid dining room, where the paper was nearly all unglued by the sun, a supper was waiting upon a round table without a cloth, for which three melancholy plates were set.

M. and Mme Padoie entered at the same time as Varajou. They were seated, then the husband and wife made the sign of the cross upon the pit of their stomachs, after which Padoie served the soup, a thick soup. It was the day for potpie. After the soup came the beef, beef too much cooked, melted and fat, which had fallen apart in boiling. The non-commissioned officer masticated it slowly with disgust, with fatigue and rage.

Mme Padoie said to her husband: "Are you going to the president's house this evening?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Do not stay late. You are all worn out every time you go out. You are not made for the world, with your bad health."

Then she spoke of the society of Vannes, of the excellent society where the Padoies were received with consideration, thanks to their religious sentiments.

Then they served a puré of potatoes with a dish of pork, in honor of the new arrival. Then some cheese, and it was finished. Not even coffee.

When Varajou understood that he was to pass the evening face to face with his sister, forced to undergo her reproaches, listen to her sermons, without even a solacing glass to cool his throat or to aid the remonstrances in slipping down, he concluded that the punishment was more than he could bear and declared that he must go to the armory to execute some commission under his leave of absence.

And he escaped at seven o'clock.

Scarcely was he in the street when he began to shake himself, like a dog just out of the water. He murmured: "What a blankety-blank life of drudgery!" And he began to search for a café, the best café in town. He found it over a room, behind two gas jets. Inside, five or six men, some semi-gentlemen, a little noisy, were seated around some little tables drinking and chatting, while two billard players were walking around the green cloth on which the ivory balls were hitting each other. They were counting: "Eighteen—nineteen. No luck. Oh! good shot! Well played! Eleven. You must play on the red. Twenty. Froze! Froze! Twelve. There! Was I right?"

Varajou ordered a demitasse and a small glass of brandy, of the best. Then he sat down and waited its coming.

He was accustomed to pass his evenings at liberty with his comrades in the clatter of glasses and the smoke of pipes. This silence, this calm, exasperated him. He began to drink, first his coffee then his brandy, and then he gave a second order. Now he had a desire to laugh, then to cry, then to sing and then of fighting someone.

He said to himself: "Jove! How this sets me up! I must make a feast of it." And the idea came to him of finding some girls to amuse himself with.

He called one of the employees: "Hey, waiter!"

"Yes sir!"

"Say, waiter, where can one go here to have a merry time?"

The man looked stupid at this question. Finally he answered: "I don't know, sir. Only here!"

"Here! And what do you call a merry time, I should like to know!"

"Oh! I don't know, sir, drinking beer or some good wine."

"Go on, you oyster! And the girls, where are they?"

"The girls! Hal hal hal!"

"Yes, the girls, where are they to be found here?"

"Girls?"

"Yes, yes, girls."

The waiter came nearer to him and said in a low voice: "You want to know where there is a house?"

"Yes, of course!"

"You take the second street to the left and then the first to the right. It is number fifteen."

"Thanks, old man. Here is something for you."

"Thanks, sir."

And Varajou went out, repeating: "Second to the left, first to the right, fifteen." At the end of a few seconds he thought: "Second to the left—yes. But in coming out of the café, do I turn to the left or to the right? Bah! It doesn't make any difference. I shall soon find out."

And he walked on, turning into the second street at the left, then in the first at the right, and looked for number fifteen. It was a house of very good appearance, where he saw the windows of the first story lighted behind the closed shutters. The vestibule door was half open, and a lamp was burning in there.

"This is the place," thought the noncommissioned officer.

Then he entered and, as no one came, he called: "Hey there! Hey!"

A little maid appeared and was struck dumb on seeing a soldier. He said to her: "Good evening, my child. The ladies are upstairs?"

"Yes sir."

"In the salon?"

"Yes sir."

"And I can go right up?"

"Yes sir."

"The first door I come to?"

"Yes sir."

He went up and perceived a room well lighted with two large lamps, a luster and two candelabra containing wax candles, four ladies in evening gowns, who seemed to be waiting for someone.

Three of them, the younger, were seated, with a somewhat starched appearance, upon a garnet velvet sofa, while the fourth, a woman about forty-five years of age, was arranging flowers in a vase; she was very large and wore a green silk frock which seemed like the envelope of a monstrous flower, her enormous arms and neck being like a rice-powdered rose.

The noncommissioned officer saluted: "Good evening, ladies."

The eldest one turned, appeared surprised, but bowed: "Good evening, sir."

He sat down. But seeing that he did not seem to be welcomed with any enthusiasm, he thought that without doubt only officers were admitted there, and the idea troubled him. Then he said to himself: "Bah! If one of them comes we shall see." And then he said: "Well, everything goes well?"

The large lady, the mistress of the house, doubtless, answered:

"Very well, thank you."

He found nothing more to say, and everybody was silent. Finally he began to be ashamed of his timidity and, laughing with a constrained laugh, said: "Oh well, there is nothing very merry about this—I'll pay for a bottle of wine——"

He had not finished his sentence when the door opened and Padoie, in evening clothes, appeared.

Varajou uttered a howl of joy and, jumping up, rushed at his brother-in-law, seized him in his arms and made him dance all around the room, crying: "Well, if here isn't Padoie! It is Padoie! It's Padoie!"

Then releasing the collector, who was lost in surprise, he said mockingly in his face: "Ah! Ah! Ah! Joker! Joker! You do break away then sometimes. Ah, what a joker. And my sister! You let her loose too—say!"

Realizing all the benefits from this unlooked-for situation, so impressed was he with the full force of it, that he threw himself upon a sofa and began to laugh so loud that the very furniture seemed to crack.

The three young ladies arose with one accord and escaped, while

the elderly one repaired toward the door, ready to flee if it became necessary.

Then two gentlemen appeared, both in evening clothes and decorated. Padoie rushed toward them, saying: "Oh, Mr. President, he is mad—surely he is mad. They sent him to us to convalesce. You can see at once that he is mad."

Varajou seated himself, comprehending nothing about him but guessing that he had done something monstrously foolish. Finally he arose and, turning toward his brother-in-law, asked: "Where are we?"

And Padoie, seized suddenly with a foolish anger, stammered:

"Where are—where—where are we? Unfortunate—miserable—in-famous fellow—where are we? In the house of the president—of the president of Mortemain—of Mortemain—of—of—of—Mortemain. Ah! Ah, you scamp—scamp—you scamp!"

IN THE COURTROOM

THE HALL of the justice of the peace of Gorgeville is full of peasants who, seated in rows along the walls, are awaiting the opening of the session.

There are tall and short, stout and thin, all with the trim appearance of a row of fruit trees. They have placed their baskets on the floor and remain silent, tranquil, preoccupied with their own affairs. They have brought with them the odor of the stable, of sweat, of sour milk and of the manure heap. Flies are buzzing under the white ceiling. Through the open door the crowing of cocks is heard.

Upon a sort of platform is a long table covered with green cloth. An old, wrinkled man sits there writing at the extreme left. A policeman, tipped back upon his chair, is gazing into the air at the extreme right. And upon the bare wall a great Christ in wood, twisted into a pitiable pose, seems to offer his eternal suffering for the cause of these brutes with the odor of beasts.

The justice of the peace enters finally. He is corpulent, high colored, and rustles his magistrate's black robe as he walks with the rapid step of a large man in a hurry; he seats himself, places his cap upon the table and looks at the assemblage with an air of profound scorn.

He is a scholarly provincial, a bright mind of the district, one of those who translate Horace, relish the little verses of Voltaire and know by heart Vert-Vert as well as the snuffy poetry of Parny.

He pronounces officially the words:

"Now, Monsieur Potel, all the cases." Then, smiling, he murmurs: "Quidquid tentabam dicere versus erat."

Then the clerk of the court, in an unintelligible voice, jabbers: "Madame Victoire Bascule versus Isidore Paturon."

An enormous woman comes forward, a lady of the country town of the canton, with a much beribboned hat, a watch chain festooned upon her breast, rings on her fingers and earrings shining like lighted candles.

The justice greets her with a look of recognition, which savors of jest, and says:

"Madame Bascule, state your troubles."

The opposing party stands on the other side. It is represented by three persons. Among them is a young peasant of twenty-five, as fat-cheeked as an apple and as red as a poppy. At his right is his wife, very young, thin, small, like a bantam chicken, with a narrow, flat head covered, as in Crete, with a pink bonnet. She has a round eye, astonished and angry, which looks sidewise, like that of poultry. At the left of the boy sits his father, an old, bent man, whose twisted body disappears in his starched blouse as if it were under a bell.

Mme Bascule explains:

"Mr. Justice, for fifteen years I have treated this boy kindly. I brought him up and loved him like a mother; I have done everything for him; I have made a man of him. He promised me, he swore to me, that he would never leave me. He even took an oath, on account of which I gave him a little property, my land at Bec-de-Martin, which is worth about six thousand. Then this little thing, little nothing, this brat——"

THE JUSTICE: Moderate your language, Madame Bascule.

MME BASCULE: A little—a little—I think I am understood—turns his head, does, I know not what, to him, neither do I know why, and he goes and marries her, this fool, this great beast, and gives her my property, my property at Bec-de-Martin. Ah no; ah no. I have a paper—here it is—which gives me back my property now. We had a statement drawn up at the notary's for the property and a statement on paper for the sake of friendship. One is worth as much as the other. Each to his right, is it not so?

She holds toward the justice a stamped paper, wide open.

ISIDORE PATURON: It is not true.

THE JUSTICE: Keep silent. You shall speak in your turn. (*He reads.*)

"I, the undersigned, Isidore Paturon, do, by this present, promise Madame Bascule, my benefactress, never to leave her while I live, and to serve her with devotion.

GORGEVILLE, August 5, 1883."

There is a cross here for the signature. Do you not know how to write?

ISIDORE: No. I don't.

THE JUSTICE: And is it you who made this cross?

ISIDORE: No, it was not I.

THE JUSTICE: Who did make it then?

ISIDORE: She did.

THE JUSTICE: You are ready to swear that you did not make this cross?

ISIDORE (*earnestly*): Upon the head of my mother and my father, my grandmother and grandfather, and of the good God who hears me, I swear that it was not I. (*He raises his hand and strikes it against his side to emphasize his oath.*)

THE JUSTICE (*laughing*): What have been your relations with Madame Bascule, the lady here present?

ISIDORE: I have helped to amuse her. (*Grinning at the audience.*)

THE JUSTICE: Be careful of your expressions. Do you mean to say that your connections have not been as pure as she pretends?

FATHER PATURON (*taking up the narrative*): He wasn't fifteen years old yet, not fifteen years old, Monsieur Judge, when she debauched——

THE JUSTICE: Do you mean debauched?

THE FATHER: You understand me. He was not fifteen years old, I say. And for four years before that already, she had nursed him with the greatest care, feeding him like a chicken she was fattening, until he was ready to split, saving your respect. And then when the time had come that she thought was just right, then she depraved him.

THE JUSTICE: Depraved? And you allowed it?

THE FATHER: Her as well as another. It has to come.

THE JUSTICE: Then what have you to complain of?

THE FATHER: Nothing! Oh, I complain of nothing, of nothing, only that he cannot get free of her when he wants to. I ask the protection of the law.

MME BASCULE: These people weary me with their lies, Monsieur Judge. I made a man of him.

THE JUSTICE: I see!

MME BASCULE: And now he denies me, leaves me, robs me of my property.

ISIDORE: It is not true, Monsieur Judge. I wanted to leave her five years ago, seeing that she had fleshed up with excess, and that didn't suit me. It troubled me much. Why? I don't know. Then I told her I was going away. She wept like a gutter and promised me her property

at Bec-de-Martin to stay a few more years, if only four or five. As for me, I said yes, of course. And what would you have done? I stayed then five years day by day and hour by hour. I was free. Each to his own. I had paid well.

(*Isidore's wife, quiet up to this time, cries out with a piercing, parrot-like voice*): Look at her, look at her, Monsieur Judge, the millstone, and see if it wasn't well paid for.

THE FATHER (*raising his head with a convinced air*): Indeed, yes, well paid for. (*Madame Bascule sinks back upon her seat and begins to weep.*)

THE JUSTICE (*paternally*): What can you expect, dear madame? I can do nothing. You have given your land at Bec-de-Martin away in a perfectly regular manner. It is his; it belongs to him. He had the incontestable right to do what he has done and to give it as a marriage gift to his wife. I have not entered into the question of—of—delicacy. I can only lay bare the facts from the point of view of the law. There is nothing more for me to do.

THE FATHER (*in a fierce voice*): Then I can go home again?

THE JUSTICE: Certainly. (*They go out under the sympathetic gaze of the peasants, as people do who win their case. Mme Bascule sits in her seat, sobbing.*)

THE JUSTICE (*smiling*): Come, come, dear madame, go home now. And if I had any counsel to give you, I should say find another—another pupil.

MME BASCULE (*through her tears*): I cannot—cannot find one.

THE JUSTICE: I regret not being able to point one out to you. (*She throws a despairing look toward Christ being tortured on the cross, then arises and walks away with little steps, hiccuping with chagrin and concealing her face in her handkerchief. The justice adds in a bantering voice*): Calypso would not be consoled at the departure of Ulysses. (*Then in a grave tone, turning toward his clerk*): Call the next case.

THE CLERK (*mumbling*): Célestin Polyte Lecacheur versus Prosper Magloire Dieulafait.

A PRACTICAL JOKE

THE JOKES that are played nowadays are somewhat dismal. They are not like the inoffensive, laughable jokes of our forefathers; still, there is nothing more amusing than to play a good joke on someone, to force

them to laugh at their own foolishness and, if they get angry, to punish them by playing a new joke on them.

I have played many a joke in my lifetime and I have had some played on me; some very good ones too. I have played some very laughable ones and some terrible ones. One of my victims died of the consequences, but it was no loss to anyone. I will tell about it someday, but it will not be an easy task, as the joke was not at all a nice one. It happened in the suburbs of Paris, and those who witnessed it are laughing yet at the recollection of it, though the victim died of it. May he rest in peace!

I will narrate two today. One in which I was the victim and another in which I was the instigator. I will begin with the former, as I do not find it so amusing, being the victim myself.

I had been invited by some friends in Picardy to come and spend a few weeks. They were fond of a joke like myself (I would not have known them had they been otherwise).

They gave me a rousing reception on my arrival. They fired guns, they kissed me and made such a fuss over me that I became suspicious.

"Be careful, old fox," I said to myself, "there is something up."

During dinner they all laughed immoderately. I thought to myself, "They are certainly projecting some good joke and intend to play it on me, for they laugh at nothing, apparently." I was on my guard all evening and looked at everybody suspiciously, even at the servants.

When bedtime came everybody escorted me to my room and bid me good night. I wondered why, and after shutting my door I stood in the middle of the room with the candle in my hand. I could hear them outside in the hall, whispering and laughing; they were watching me no doubt. I looked at the walls, inspected the furniture, the ceiling, the floor, but I found nothing suspicious. I heard footsteps close to my door; surely they were looking through the keyhole. Then it struck me that perhaps my light would go out suddenly and I would be left in the dark, so I lighted all the candles and looked around once more, but I discovered nothing. After having inspected the windows and the shutters, I closed the latter with care; then I drew the curtains and placed a chair against them. If someone should try to come in that way I would be sure to hear them, I thought. Then I sat down cautiously. I thought the chair would give way beneath me, but it was solid enough. I did not dare to go to bed, but as it was getting late I realized that I was ridiculous. If they were watching me, as I supposed they were, they certainly must have laughed heartily at my uneasiness, so I resolved to go to bed. Having made up my mind, I approached the alcove. The bed looked particularly suspicious to me, and I drew the heavy curtains back, pulled on them, but they held fast. "Perhaps a

bucket of water is hidden on the top, all ready to fall on me, or else the bed may fall apart as soon as I lie on it," I thought. I racked my brain to try and remember all the different jokes I had played on others, so as to guess what might be in store for me; I was not going to be caught, not I!

Suddenly an idea struck me which I thought capital. I gently pulled the mattress off the bed, and it came toward me, along with the sheets and blankets. I dragged them in the middle of the room near the door and made my bed up again the best way I could, put out all the lights and felt my way into bed. I lay awake at least another hour, starting at every little sound, but everything seemed quiet, so I at last went to sleep.

I must have slept profoundly for some time, when suddenly I woke up with a start. Something heavy had fallen on me, and at the same time a hot liquid streamed all over my neck and chest, which made me scream with pain. A terrible noise filled my ears, as if a whole sideboard full of dishes had fallen in them. I was suffocating under the weight, so I reached out my hand to feel the object, and I felt a face, a nose and whiskers. I gave that face a terrible blow with my fist, but instantaneously I received a shower of blows which drove me out of bed in a hurry and out into the hall.

To my amazement I found it was broad daylight and everybody coming up the stairs to find out the cause of the noise. What we found was the valet, sprawled out on the bed, struggling among the broken dishes and tray. He had brought me some breakfast and, having encountered my improvised couch, had very unwillingly dropped the breakfast as well as himself on my face!

The precautions I had taken to close the shutters and curtains and to sleep in the middle of the room had been my undoing. The very thing I had so carefully avoided had happened.

They certainly had a good laugh on me that day!

The other joke I speak of dates back to my boyhood days. I was spending my vacation at home, as usual, in the old castle in Picardy.

I had just finished my second term at college and had been particularly interested in chemistry and especially in a compound called *phosphure de calcium* which, when thrown in water, would catch fire, explode, followed by fumes of an offensive odor. I had brought a few handfuls of this compound with me, so as to have fun with it during my vacation.

An old lady named Mme. Dufour often visited us. She was a cranky, vindictive, horrid old thing. I do not know why, but somehow she hated me. She misconstrued everything I did or said, and she never missed a chance to tattle about me, the old hag! She wore a wig of

beautiful brown hair, although she was more than sixty, and the most ridiculous little caps adorned with pink ribbons. She was well thought of because she was rich, but I hated her to the bottom of my heart, and I resolved to revenge myself by playing a joke on her.

A cousin of mine, who was of the same age as I, was visiting us, and I communicated my plan to him, but my audacity frightened him.

One night when everybody was downstairs I sneaked into Mme. Dufour's room, secured a receptacle into which I deposited a handful of the calcium phosphate, having assured myself beforehand that it was perfectly dry, and ran to the garret to await developments.

Pretty soon I heard everybody coming upstairs to bed. I waited until everything was still, then I came downstairs barefooted, holding my breath, until I came to Mme Dufour's door and looked at my enemy through the keyhole.

She was putting her things away and, having taken her dress off, she donned a white wrapper. She then filled a glass with water and, putting her whole hand in her mouth as if she were trying to tear her tongue out, she pulled out something pink and white which she deposited in the glass. I was horribly frightened but soon found it was only her false teeth she had taken out. She then took off her wig, and I perceived a few straggling white hairs on the top of her head. They looked so comical that I almost burst out laughing. She kneeled down to say her prayers, got up and approached my instrument of vengeance. I waited awhile, my heart beating with expectation.

Suddenly I heard a slight sound, then a series of explosions. I looked at Mme. Dufour; her face was a study. She opened her eyes wide, then shut them, then opened them again and looked. The white substance was crackling, exploding at the same time, while a thick, white smoke curled up mysteriously toward the ceiling.

Perhaps the poor woman thought it was some satanic fireworks, or perhaps that she had been suddenly afflicted with some horrible disease; at all events, she stood there, speechless with fright, her gaze riveted on the supernatural phenomenon. Suddenly she screamed and fell swooning to the floor. I ran to my room, jumped into bed and closed my eyes, trying to convince myself that I had not left my room and had seen nothing.

"She is dead," I said to myself; "I have killed her," and I listened anxiously to the sound of footsteps. I heard voices and laughter, and the next thing I knew my father was soundly boxing my ears.

Mme Dufour was very pale when she came down the next day, and she drank glass after glass of water. Perhaps she was trying to extinguish the fire which she imagined was in her, although the doctor

had assured her that there was no danger. Since then when anyone speaks of disease in front of her, she sighs and says:

"Oh, if you only knew! There are such strange diseases."

A STRANGE FANCY

IT WAS AT THE END of the dinner opening the hunting season at the house of Marquis de Bertrans. Eleven hunters, eight young women and the doctor of the neighborhood were seated around the great illuminated table covered with fruits and flowers.

They came to speak of love, and a great discussion arose, the eternal discussion as to whether one could love truly but once or many times. They cited examples of people who had never had but one serious love; they also cited other examples of others who had loved often, violently. The men, generally, pretended that the passion, like a malady, could strike the same person many times and strike to kill if an obstacle appeared in his path. Although the point of view was not contestable, the women, whose opinion depended upon poesy more than on observation, affirmed that love, true love, the great love, could only fall once upon a mortal; that it was like a thunderbolt, this love, and that a heart touched by it remained ever after so vacant, ravaged and burned out that no other powerful sentiment, even a dream, could again take root.

The marquis, having loved much, combated this belief in lively fashion:

"I will tell you that one can love many times with all his strength and all his soul. You cite to me people who have killed themselves for love as proof of the impossibility of a second passion. I answer that if they had not been guilty of this foolishness of suicide, which removed them from all chance of another fall, they would have been healed, and they would have recommenced again and again, until their natural death. It is with lovers as it is with drunkards. He who has drunk will drink—he who has loved will love. It is simply a matter of temperament."

They chose the doctor as arbitrator, an old Paris physician, retired to the country, and begged him to give his opinion.

To be exact, he had none. "As the marquis had said, it is an affair of temperament."

"As for myself," he continued, "I have known of one passion which lasted fifty-five years without a day of respite and which was terminated only by death."

The marquis clapped his hands.

"This is beautiful," said a lady. "And what a dream to be so loved! What happiness to live fifty-five years enveloped in a deep, living affection! How happy and benign must be the life of one who is adored like that!"

The doctor laughed.

"In fact, madame," he said, "you are deceived on that point, because the one loved was a man. You know him; it is Monsieur Chouquet, the village pharmacist. And as for the woman, you knew her, too; it is the old woman who put cane seats in chairs and came every year to this house. But how can I make you comprehend the matter?"

The enthusiasm of the women fell. On their faces a look of disgust said: "Pooh!" as if love could only strike those fine and distinguished creatures who were worthy of the interest of fashionable people.

The doctor continued:

"I was called three months ago to the bedside of this old woman. She was dying. She had come here in the old carriage that served her for a house, drawn by the nag that you have often seen and accompanied by her two great black dogs, her friends and guard. The curate was already there. She made us the executors of her will, and in order to unveil the meaning of her testament, she related the story of her life. I have never heard anything more singular or more affecting.

"Her father made chair seats and so did her mother. She had never known a home in any one place upon the earth. As a little girl she went around ragged and dirty. They would stop beside the road at the entrance to towns, unharness the horse and let him browse; the dog would go to sleep with his nose in his paws; the little one would play in the grass while the father and mother, under the shade of the elms bordering the roadside, would reseat all the old chairs in the neighborhood.

"No one ever talked in this ambulance dwelling. After the necessary words to decide who should make the tour of the houses and who should call out the well-known 'Chairs to mend!' they would sit down to plait the straw, face to face or side by side.

"When the child went too far away or struck up an acquaintance with some urchin in the village the angry voice of the father would call her: 'You come back here, you brat!' And these were the only words of tenderness she ever heard.

"When she grew larger they sent her around to collect the worn-out chairs to be rebottomed. Then she made some acquaintances from place to place among the street children. Then it would be the parents of her new friends who would call brutally to their children: 'Will you come here, you scamp! Let me catch you talking to that barefoot again!'

"Often the boys would throw stones at her. Sometimes ladies would give her a few pennies and look at her closely.

"One day—she was then eleven years old—as they were passing through this place, she met the little Chouquet behind the cemetery, weeping because some comrade had stolen two sous from him. The tears of this little well-to-do citizen, one of those fortunate ones from whom in her queer noodle she had imagined herself cut off, one of those beings always content and joyous, quite upset her. She went up to him, and when she learned the cause of his trouble, she poured into his hands all her savings, seven sous, which he took quite naturally, drying his tears. Then, mad with joy, she had the audacity to embrace him. As he was counting the money attentively, he allowed her to do it. Seeing that she was not repulsed or beaten, she did the same thing again. She embraced him with arms and heart. Then she ran away.

"What could have taken place in her miserable head after that? Did she attach herself to this booby because she had sacrificed for him her vagabond fortune or because she had given to him her first tender kiss? The mystery is the same for the small as for the great.

"For months she dreamed of this corner of the cemetery and of this boy. In the hope of seeing him again, she robbed her parents, keeping back a sou here and there, either from a chair seat or upon the provisions which she was sent to buy.

"When she returned here she had two francs in her pocket, but she only saw the little druggist very properly behind the big colored bottle of his father's shop, between a red decanter and a tapeworm. She loved him there still more charmed, aroused to ecstasy by this glory of colored water, this apotheosis of shining crystal.

"This picture became an ineffaceable memory, and when she saw him the following year playing marbles near the school with his comrades, she threw herself upon him, seized him in her arms and kissed him with such violence that he began to howl with fear. Then in order to appease him, she gave him all her money—seventy cents, a real treasure which he looked at with bulging eyes.

"He took it and let her caress him as much as she wished.

"During the next four years she turned into his hand all her surplus, which he pocketed with a clear conscience, in exchange for permitted kisses. There was sometimes fifteen cents, sometimes forty and once only five and one half—and she wept with pain and humiliation at this, but it had been a bad year. The last time there was a five-franc piece, a great round piece that made him laugh with content.

"She thought of nothing but him, and he waited her return with a certain impatience, running to meet her, which made the heart of the girl leap with joy.

"Then he disappeared. They sent him away to college. She found it out by skillful questioning. Then she used her diplomacy to change her parents' itinerary and make them pass through there in vacation. She succeeded but for one year; then for two years she did not see him; then she scarcely recognized him, so much was he changed; he was so large and handsome in his coat with the brass buttons and so imposing. He feigned not to see her and passed proudly by near her.

"She wept over it for two days, and after that she suffered without ceasing.

"Every year she returned here, passing him without daring to bow and without his deigning to raise his eyes to her. She loved him passionately. She said to me: 'Doctor, he is the only man I have seen on earth; I have not known that there are others existing.'

"Her parents died. She continued their trade but took with her two dogs instead of one, two terrible dogs that no one would dare encounter.

"One day in entering this village, where her heart still remained, she perceived a young woman coming out of the Chouquet shop on the arm of her well-beloved. It was his wife. He was married.

"That evening she threw herself into the pond on the mayor's estate. A drunken man got her out and took her to the pharmacy. Chouquet, the son, came down in his dressing gown to care for her and, without appearing to recognize her, loosed her clothing and rubbed her, then said in a hard voice: 'My but you are foolish! It is not necessary to make a beast of yourself like this!'

"That was sufficient to cure her. He had spoken to her! She was happy for a long time.

"He wanted no remuneration for his services, but she insisted upon paying him well. And all her life was spent like this. She made chair seats and thought of Chouquet. Every year she saw him behind his large windows. She had the habit of buying from him all her medical needs. In this way she could see him near to and speak to him and still give him a little money.

"As I told you in the beginning, she died this spring. After having related her sad history, she begged me to give to him whom she had so patiently loved all the savings of her life, because she had worked only for him, she said, fasting, even, in order to put aside and to be sure that he would think of her at least once after she was dead.

"She then gave me two thousand three hundred and twenty-seven francs. I allowed the curate twenty-seven for burial and carried off the rest when she had drawn her last breath.

"The next day I took myself to the house of the Chouquets. They had just finished breakfast, sitting opposite each other, large and red, smelling of their pharmaceutical products, important and satisfied.

"They made me be seated; they offered me a *kirsch* which I accepted; then I commenced my discourse in an emotional voice, persuaded that they were going to weep.

"When they understood that he had been loved by this vagabond, this chair mender, this rover, Chouquet bounced with indignation, as if she had robbed him of his reputation, of the esteem of honest people, of his honor, of something of that delicacy that was dearer to him than life.

"His wife, also exasperated, kept repeating: 'The beggar! The beggar! The beggar!' without being able to find any other word.

"He got up and walked around the table with long strides, his Greek cap tipped over his ear. He muttered: 'Think of it, Doctor! This is a horrible thing to happen to a man! What is to be done? Oh, if I had known this while she was alive I would have had her arrested and shut up in prison. And she wouldn't have got out, I can tell you!'

"I was stupefied at the result of my pious proceedings. I neither knew what to say nor what to do. But I had to complete my mission. I said: 'She has charged me to give you all her savings, which amount to two thousand three hundred francs. As what I have told you seems to be so very disagreeable to you, perhaps it would be better to give this money to the poor.'

"They looked at me, the man and the woman, impotent from shock. I drew the money from my pocket, miserable money from all the country and of every mark, gold and sous mixed. Then I asked: 'What do you decide?'

"Madame Chouquet spoke first. She said: 'But since it was the last wish of this woman—it seems to me that it would be difficult to refuse it.'

"The husband, somewhat confused, answered: 'We could always buy with that money something for our children.'

"I remarked dryly: 'As you wish.'

He continued: 'Yes, give it to us, since she has put it in your charge. We can always find means of using it in some good work.'

"I laid down the money, bowed and went out.

"The next day Chouquet came to me and said brusquely: 'She must have left a wagon here, that—that woman. What are you going to do with this wagon?'

" 'Nothing,' I said. 'Take it if you wish.'

" 'Exactly. Just what I want. I will make a lean-to of it for my kitchen stove.'

"He was going, but I recalled him. 'She also left an old horse and her two dogs. Do you want them?'

"He stopped, surprised: 'Ah no,' he answered, 'what could I do with them? Dispose of them as you wish.'

"Then he laughed and extended his hand, which I took. What else could I do? In our country a medical man and a druggist should not be enemies.

"I have kept the dogs at my house. The curate, who has a large yard, took the horse. The wagon serves Chouquet as a cabin, and he has bought five railroad bonds with the money.

"This is the only profound love that I have met in my life."

The doctor was silent. Then the marquis, with tears in his eyes, sighed. "Decidedly, it is only women who know how to love."

AFTER DEATH

ALL VEZIERS-LE-RETHEL had assisted at the funeral and interment of M. Badon-Leremince, and the last words of the discourse of the delegate of the district remained in the memory of all:

"He was an honest man, at least."

Honest man he had been in all the appreciable acts of his life: in his words, in his example, in his attitude, in his bearing, in his step, in the cut of his beard and the form of his hats. He had never said a word that did not contain an example, never gave alms without accompanying it with advice, never held a hand without having the air of giving it a kind of benediction.

He left two children, a son and a daughter. His son was general counselor, and his daughter, having married a notary, M. Poirel de la Voulte, held a high place in Veziers.

They were inconsolable at the death of their father, for they loved him sincerely.

As soon as the ceremonies were over they returned to the house of death, and all three together, the son, the daughter and the son-in-law, opened the will, whose seal was to be broken by them alone, and that only after the coffin had been placed in the earth. A direction upon the envelope expressed this wish.

It was M. Poirel de la Voulte who opened the paper, being accustomed to these things in the capacity of notary and, having adjusted his eyeglasses over his eyes, he read in a dull voice, made for particularizing contracts:

"My children, my dear children, I could not sleep tranquilly the eternal sleep if I did not make a confession to you from the other side

of the tomb, the confession of a crime, remorse of which has rent my life. Yes, I have committed a crime, a frightful, abominable crime.

"I was twenty-six years old, had just been called to the Bar in Paris and was living the life of young people from the provinces, stranded, without acquaintances, friends or parents in the city.

"I took a mistress. There are people who are indignant at this word, "mistress," but there are also beings who cannot live alone. I am one of these. Solitude fills me with a horrible agony, especially solitude in a lodging, before the fire in the evening. It seems to me then that I am alone upon earth, frightfully alone, surrounded by vague dangers and terrible, unknown things, and the partition which separates me from my neighbor, from my neighbor whom I do not know, makes him as far removed as the stars that I see from my window. A sort of fever invades me, a fever of impatience and fear, and the silence of the walls overpowers me. It is so profound, so sad, this silence of a room where one lives alone! It is a silence about the soul, and when the furniture cracks or starts, the courage wanes, for one expects no sound in this mournful dwelling place.

"How many times, unnerved, frightened by this mute immobility, have I begun to speak, to pronounce some words, without sequence, without reason, in order to make some noise. My voice then appeared to me so strange that I was afraid of that also. Is there anything more frightful than talking alone in an empty house? The voice seems like that of another, an unknown voice, speaking without cause to no one into the hollow air, with no ear to listen, for one knows, before the words are uttered into the space of the apartment, what the lips are about to say. And when they resound lugubriously in the silence they seem more like an echo, the echo of singular words pronounced low by the thoughts.

"I took a mistress, a young girl like all those young girls who live in Paris at some trade insufficient to support them. She was sweet, good and simple. Her parents lived at Poissy. She went to stay a few days with them from time to time.

"For a year I lived tranquilly enough with her, fully decided to leave her when I should see some young person with whom I was well enough pleased to want to marry. I would leave to this one a small income, since it is admitted in our society that the love of a woman ought to be paid for in money when she is poor, in jewels if she is rich.

"But behold, there came a day when she announced to me that she was *enceinte*. I was struck down and perceived in an instant the ruin of my whole existence. The chain was apparent that I must drag to my dying day, in the near future, in my old age, always, the chain of a woman bound to my life by a child, the chain of a child whom it

would be necessary to bring up, watch over and protect, always concealing myself from him and him from the world. My mind was overturned by this news, and a confused desire, which I did not formulate but which I felt in my heart, took to showing itself, like people concealed behind portieres, waiting until someone tells them to appear, a criminal desire that roamed around at the bottom of my thoughts: If some accident could happen! There are so many of these little beings who die before birth!

"Oh! I did not desire the death of my mistress. Poor girl, I loved her well! But I wished, perhaps, the death of the other before I had seen it.

"It was born. I had a household in my bachelor's quarters, a false household with a child—a horrible thing. It resembled all infants. I could scarcely love it. Fathers, you see, do not love until later. They have not the instinctive, surpassing love and tenderness of mothers; their affection is awakened little by little, as their mind is drawn toward their children each day in the bonds which unite living beings together.

"A year passed away. I now fled from my too-small dwelling, where linen and blankets and stockings, the size of a pair of gloves, were dragging around, and a thousand things of this kind were left upon the furniture, especially upon the arm of the easy chair. I fled particularly to escape from hearing him cry, for he cried at all times, when he was changed, when he was washed, when one touched him, when he was put to bed, when he was taken up, without ceasing.

"I had made some acquaintances and had met her who was to become your mother. I came to love her, and a desire to marry her was awakened in me. I paid her my court; I asked her in marriage; she accepted me.

"And now I found myself in this predicament: To marry, having a child, this young girl whom I adored—or to tell the truth and renounce her and happiness, the future, everything, for her parents, rigid and scrupulous people, would never give her to me if they knew.

"I passed one month of horrible anguish, of moral torture, a month where a thousand thoughts frightened and haunted me, and I felt growing in me a hate against my son, against this little piece of living, crying flesh who barred my way, ruined my life and condemned me to an existence without hope, those vague hopes so charming to youth.

"At this time the mother of my companion fell ill, and I remained alone with the infant. It was in December. It was terribly cold. What a night! My mistress had gone. I had dined in my narrow dining room and then entered softly into the chamber where the little one slept.

"I seated myself in an armchair before the fire. The wind sighed, making the glass crack, a wind dry with frost, and I saw out of the

window the stars scintillating with that bright light which they have on frosty nights.

“Then the besetting thought which had haunted me for a month entered my head again. Whenever I remained still it descended upon me, entered into me and roamed about. It gnawed me as fixed ideas gnaw, as a cancer gnaws into the flesh. It was there, in my head, in my heart, in my entire body, it seemed to me, and it devoured me as if it had been a beast. I tried to drive it, push it away, to open my thoughts to other things, to new hopes, as one opens a window to the fresh air of morning to drive out the vitiated air of night, but I could not, even for a second, get it out of my brain. I know not how to express this torture. It gnawed at my soul, and I felt with a frightful grief, a physical and moral grief, each succeeding pang.

“My existence was ended! How could I ever get out of the situation? How draw away or how confess?

“And I loved her who was to become your mother with a mad passion which this insurmountable obstacle further exaggerated.

“A terrible anger grew in me which tightened my throat, an anger which approached madness—mania! Surely I was mad that night!

“The child slept. I arose and went and looked at him sleeping. There he was, this abortion, this larva, this nothing, who condemned me to a life of unhappiness without appeal.

“He slept, his mouth open, buried in the bedclothes in a cradle near my bed, where I could not sleep myself!

“How did I accomplish what I did? Do I know? What force drove me; what power of malice possessed me? Oh! The temptation of the crime came to me without announcing itself. I only recall that my heart was beating furiously. It beat so strongly that I heard it as one hears the blows of a hammer behind a partition wall. I only recall that! My heart beating! In my head there was a strange confusion, a tumult, a derangement of reason, of complete cold-bloodedness. I was in one of those frightful hours of hallucination when a man is no longer conscious of his acts, either in direction or will.

“I gently raised the covers which concealed the body of my child; I threw them upon the foot of the cradle and looked at him all bare. He did not wake. Then I went toward the window very gently and opened it.

“A breath of cold air came in like an assassin, so cold that I drew back before it. The two candles flickered. And I remained there near the window for a long time, not daring to turn and see what was behind me and feeling ever upon my forehead, my cheeks, my hands, the fatal air that was constantly gliding in. This lasted a long time.

"I did not reflect. I was thinking of nothing. Suddenly a little cough made a frightful shiver pass through me from head to foot, a shiver which I can feel at this moment at the roots of my hair. With a startled movement I closed brusquely the two sides of the window and, turning, hastened to the cradle.

"He still slept, his mouth open, all bare. I touched his limbs; they were icy, and I covered him again. My heart seemed suddenly to break and to be filled with pity and tenderness for this poor little innocent being whom I had wished to kill. I kissed him over and over again upon his fine hair. Then I returned and seated myself before the fire.

"I thought with horror of what I had done and asked myself whence came these tempests of the soul when man loses all notion of things, all control of himself, and moves in a sort of fearful drunkenness, without knowing what he does, without knowing where he goes, like a ship in a hurricane.

"The child coughed once again, and I felt torn to the heart. If he should die! My God, my God! What would become of me?

"I got up and went to look at him; and with a candle in my hand I bent over him. Seeing him breathe tranquilly, I was reassured, even when he coughed for the third time. But I felt such a shock and made such a movement to arrest it (as one does at the sight of some frightful thing) that I let the candle fall.

"And, straightening myself after having picked it up, I perceived that my temples were moistened with sweat, with a sweat hot and cold at the same time, which produced an agony of the soul like that of some frightful, moral suffering or some unnamable torture, burning like fire and cold as ice, piercing the bones and the skin of my head.

"I remained bending over my son until daybreak, calming myself when he was quiet and transfixed by an abominable grief when a feeble cough came from his mouth.

"He awoke with red eyes, an inflamed throat and difficult breathing. When my mistress entered the house and saw him we sent immediately for a physician. He came in an hour and asked, after having examined him:

" "Has he taken cold?"

"I began to tremble, as very old people tremble, and stammered:

" "No, I think not." Then I asked:

" "What is the matter? Is it anything grave?"

"He answered:

" "I cannot say yet. I will return this evening."

"He returned in the evening. My son had passed nearly the whole day in an invincible sleepiness, coughing from time to time. A congestion of the lungs now showed itself.

"This lasted ten days. I cannot express what I suffered during those interminable hours which separate the morning from evening and the evening from the morning.

"He died. . . .

"And since—since that moment I have not passed an hour, no, not an hour, without that atrocious, cutting memory, a memory which gnaws, which tortures and rends the mind and stirs in me like a writhing beast chained up in the bottom of my soul.

"Oh! If I could have become mad!"

M. Poiré de la Voulte put up his glasses, a movement which was usual with him when he had finished reading a contract, and the three heirs of the dead man looked at each other without saying a word, pale and immovable. At the end of a minute the notary said:

"This must be destroyed."

The two others lowered their heads in sign of assent. He lighted a candle, separated carefully the pages which contained the dangerous confession from the pages which contained the disposition of the money, then he presented them to the flame and threw them into the fireplace.

And they watched the white leaves as they were consumed. Soon they were nothing more than a lot of little black heaps. And as they still perceived some letters which were legible on the paper, the daughter crushed it with the end of her foot, mixing it with the old ashes.

Then they all three remained quiet for some time, looking at it as if they feared that the charred secret might fly away up the chimney.

ON CATS

Cape of Antibes.

SEATED ON A BENCH the other day at my door in the full sunlight, with a cluster of anemones in flower before me, I read a book recently published, an honest book, something uncommon and charming, *The Cooper*, by George Duval. A large white cat that belonged to the gardener jumped upon my lap and by the shock closed the book, which I placed at my side in order to caress the animal.

The weather was warm; a faint, suggestive odor of new flowers was in the air, and at times came little cool breezes from the great white summits that I could see in the distance. But the sun was hot and sharp, and the day was one of those that stir the earth, make it alive, break open the seed in order to animate the sleeping germs and cleave the buds so that the young leaves may spring forth. The cat rolled itself on my knees, lying on its back, its paws in the air, with claws protruding,

then receding. The little creature showed its pointed teeth beneath its lips, and its green eyes gleamed in the half-closed slit of its eyelids. I caressed and rubbed the soft, nervous animal, supple as a piece of silk, smooth, warm, delicious, dangerous. She purred with satisfaction, yet was quite ready to scratch, for a cat loves to scratch as well as to be petted. She held out her neck and rolled again, and when I took my hand from her she raised herself and pushed her head against my lifted hand.

I made her nervous, and she made me nervous also, for although I like cats in a certain way, I detest them at the same time—those animals so charming and so treacherous. It gives me pleasure to fondle them, to rub under my hand their silky fur that sometimes crackles, to feel their warmth through this fine and exquisite covering. Nothing is softer, nothing gives to the skin a sensation more delicate, more refined, more rare, than the warm, living coat of a cat. But this living coat also communicates to me, through the ends of my fingers, a strange and ferocious desire to strangle the animal I am caressing. I feel in her the desire she has to bite and scratch me. I feel it, that same desire, as if it were an electric current communicated from her to me. I run my fingers through the soft fur, and the current passes through my nerves from my finger tips to my heart, even to my brain; it tingles throughout my being and causes me to shut my teeth hard.

And if the animal begins to bite and scratch me, I seize her by the neck; I give her a turn and throw her far from me, as I would throw a stone from a sling, so quickly and so brutally that she never has time to revenge herself.

I remember that when I was a child I loved cats, yet I had even then that strange desire to strangle them with my little hands, and one day at the end of the garden, at the beginning of the wood, I perceived suddenly something gray rolling in the high grass. I went to see what it was and found a cat caught in a snare, strangling, suffocating, dying. It rolled, tore up the ground with its claws, bounded, fell inert, then began again, and its hoarse, rapid breathing made a noise like a pump, a frightful noise which I hear yet. I could have taken a spade and cut the snare; I could have gone to find the servant or tell my father. No, I did not move, and with beating heart I watched it die with a trembling and cruel joy. It was a cat! If it had been a dog I would rather have cut the copper wire with my teeth than let it suffer a second more. When the cat was quite dead, but yet warm, I went to feel of it and pull its tail!

These little creatures are delicious, notwithstanding, delicious above all, because in caressing them while they are rubbing against our skin, purring and rolling on us, looking at us with their yellow eyes which

seem never to see us, we realize the insecurity of their tenderness, the perfidious selfishness of their pleasure.

Some women also give us that sensation—women who are charming, tender, with clear yet false eyes, who have chosen us entirely for their gratification. Near them, when they open their arms and offer their lips, when a man folds them to his heart with bounding pulses, when he tastes the joy of their delicate caress, he realizes well that he holds a perfidious, tricky cat, with claws and fangs, an enemy in love who will bite him when she is tired of kisses.

Many of the poets have loved cats. Baudelaire has sung to them divinely.

I had one day the strange sensation of having inhabited the enchanted palace of the white cat, a magic castle where reigned one of those undulant, mysterious, troubling animals, the only one, perhaps, of all living creatures that one never hears walk.

This adventure occurred last year on this same shore of the Mediterranean. At Nice there was atrocious heat, and I asked myself as to whether there was not, somewhere in the mountains above us, a fresh valley where one might find a breath of fresh air.

Thorence was recommended to me, and I wished to see it immediately. To get there I had first to go to Grasse, the town of perfumes, concerning which I shall write someday and tell you how the essences and quintessences of flowers are manufactured there, costing up to two thousand francs the liter. I passed the night in an old hotel of the town, a poor kind of inn, where the quality of the food was as doubtful as the cleanliness of the rooms. I went on my way in the morning.

The road went straight up into the mountains, following the deep ravines, which were overshadowed by sterile peaks, pointed and savage. I thought that my advisers had recommended to me a very extraordinary kind of summer excursion, and I was almost on the point of returning to Nice the same day, when I saw suddenly before me, on a mountain which appeared to close the entrance to the entire valley, an immense and picturesque ruined castle, showing towers and broken walls, of a strange architecture, in profile against the sky. It proved to be an ancient castle that had belonged to Templars, who in bygone days had governed this country of Florence.

I made a detour of this mountain and suddenly discovered a long, green valley, fresh and reposeful. Upon its level were meadows, running waters and willows, and on its sides grew tall pine trees. In front of the ruins, on the other side of the valley but standing lower, was an inhabited castle, called the Castle of the Four Towers, which was built about the year 1530. One could not see any trace of the Renaissance period, however. It was a strong and massive square structure,

apparently possessing tremendous powers of resistance, and it was supported by four defensive towers, as its name would indicate.

I had a letter of introduction to the owner of this manor, who would not permit me to go to the hotel. The whole valley is one of the most charming spots in summer that one could dream of. I wandered about there until evening, and after dinner I went to the apartment that had been reserved for me. I first passed through a sort of sitting room, the walls of which were covered by old Cordova leather; then I went through another room, where by the light of my candle I noticed rapidly in passing several old portraits of ladies—those paintings of which Théophile Gautier has written.

I entered the room where my bed was and looked around me. The walls were hung with antique tapestries, where one saw rose-colored donjons in blue landscapes and great fantastic birds sitting under foliage of precious stones! My dressing room was in one of the towers. The windows, wide on the inside and narrowed to a mere slit on the outside, going through the entire thickness of the walls, were, in reality, nothing but loopholes through which one might kill an approaching enemy.

I shut my door, went to bed and slept. Presently I dreamed; usually one dreams a little of something that has passed during the day. I seemed to be traveling; I entered an inn, where I saw at a table before the fire a servant in complete livery and a mason—a strange association which did not astonish me. These people spoke of Victor Hugo, who had just died, and I took part in their conversation. At last I went to bed in a room, the door of which I could not shut, and suddenly I saw the servant and the mason, armed with sabers, coming softly toward my bed.

I awoke at once, and a few minutes passed before I could recollect where I was. Then I recalled quickly my arrival of the day before at Thorence, the occurrences of the evening and my pleasant reception by the owner. I was just about to close my eyes when I saw distinctly in the darkness in the middle of my room, at about the height of a man's head, two fiery eyes watching me.

I seized a match, and while striking it I heard a noise, a light, soft noise, like the sound of a wet rag thrown on the floor, but after I had lighted the candle I saw nothing but a tall table in the middle of the room. I rose, went through both apartments, looked under the bed and into the closets and found nothing. I thought then that perhaps I had continued dreaming after I was awake, and so I went to sleep again but not without trouble.

I dreamed again. This time I traveled once more, but in the Orient, in the country that I love. I arrived at the house of a Turk, who lived

in the middle of a desert. He was a superb Turk—not an Arab, but a Turk, fat, friendly and charming. He was dressed in Turkish attire, with a turban on his head and a whole shopful of silk on his back—a real Turk of the Théâtre Français, who made me compliments while offering me sweetmeats, sitting on a voluptuous divan.

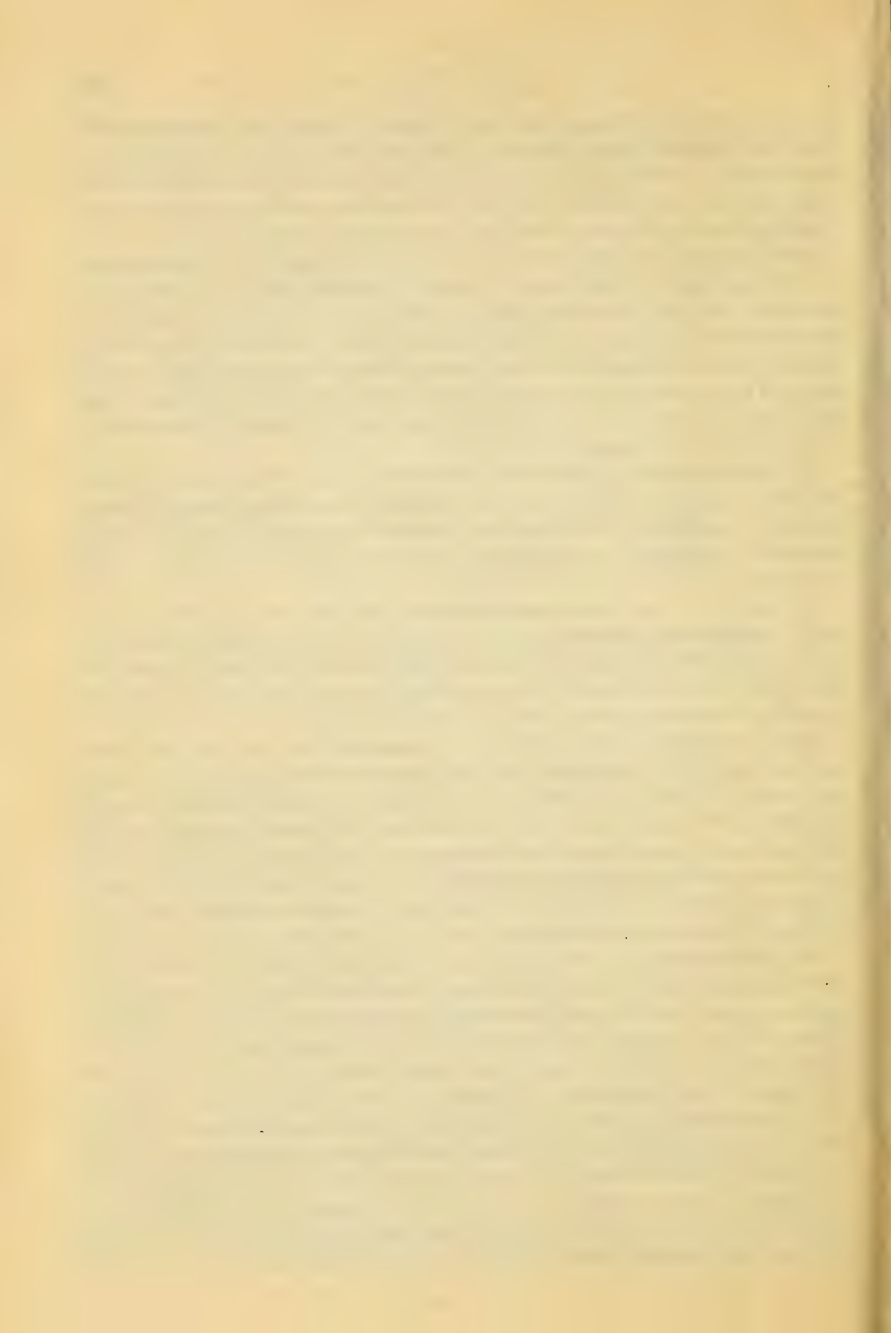
Then a little black boy took me to a room—all my dreams ended in this fashion in those days! It was a perfumed room decorated in sky blue, with skins of wild beasts on the floor, and before the fire—the idea of fire pursued me even in the desert—on a low chair, was a woman, lightly clothed, who was waiting on me. She was of the purest oriental type, with stars tattooed on her cheeks and forehead and chin; she had immense eyes, a beautiful form and slightly brown skin, a warm and exciting skin.

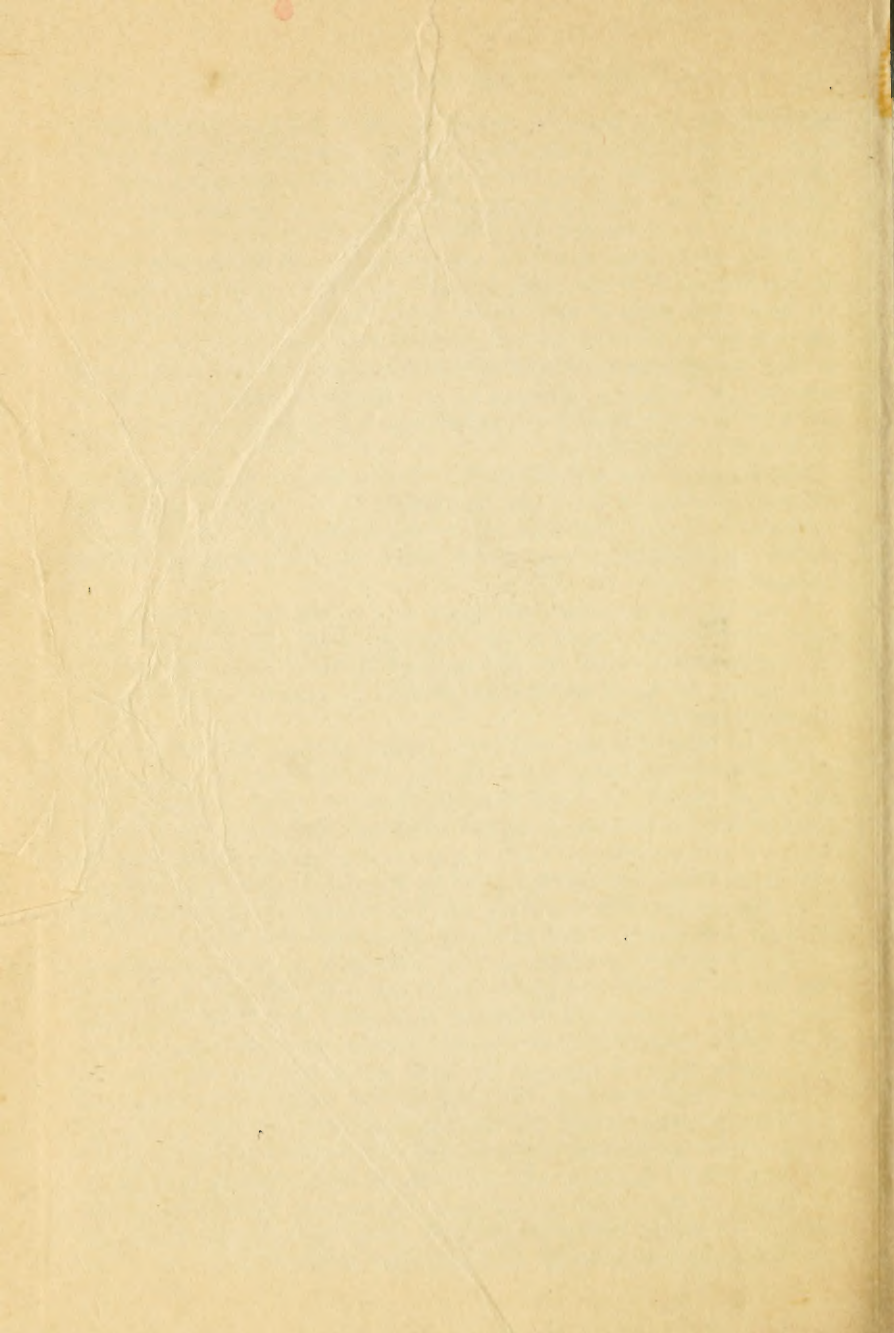
She looked at me, and I thought: "This is what I understand to be the true meaning of the word hospitality. In our stupid and prudish northern countries, with their hateful mawkishness of ideas and silly notions of morality, a man would never receive a stranger in this fashion."

I went up to the woman and spoke to her, but she replied only by signs, not knowing a word of my language, which the Turk, her master, understood so well. All the happier that she would be silent, I took her by the hand and led her toward my couch, where I placed myself by her side. . . .

But one always awakens at those moments! So I opened my eyes and was not greatly surprised to feel beneath my hand something soft and warm, which I caressed lovingly. Then, my mind clearing, I recognized that it was a cat, a big cat rolled up against my cheek, sleeping there with confidence. I left it there and composed myself to sleep once more. When daylight appeared he was gone, and I really thought I had dreamed he had been with me, for I could not understand how he could have come in and gone out, as my door was locked.

When I related my dream and my adventure to my agreeable host (not the whole of it!) he began to laugh and said: "He came in through his own door," and, raising a curtain, he showed me a little round hole in the wall. I learned then that the old habitations of this country have long narrow runways through the walls, which go from the cellar to the garret, from the servants' rooms to the rooms of the *seigneur*, and these passages render the cat king and master of the interior of the house. He goes where it pleases him, visits his domain at his pleasure, sleeps in all the beds, sees all, hears all, knows all the secrets, all the habits, all the shames of the house. Everywhere he is at home, the animal that moves without noise, the silent prowler, the nocturnal rover of the hollowed walls. And I thought of Baudelaire.





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